



The Guardian

The monthly newsletter of the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services

August, 2021

In this Issue:

-DVS Quarterly Briefing	1
-New VARO, SFNC, and NMVAHCS Directors	3
-Bataan Defender Death	5
-Poster Donated to Vietnam Veterans Memorial	6
-Donations Sought for Vietnam Wall Replica	7
-Wall That Heals to Visit New Mexico	8
-NM Veterans Memorial Seeks Volunteers	9
-Free Parking on Military/Veterans Day at the NM State Fair	10
-DVS Employee of the Quarter	10
-Veterans Groups Community Board	11
-News from the VA	18
-DVS Statewide Offices	21

DVS Holds First Quarterly Briefing Since the Onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic



The New Mexico Department of Veterans Services (DVS) held a quarterly briefing in Albuquerque on August 6—the agency’s first briefing in 21-months due to the halt of public gatherings by state agencies through the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

DVS Secretary Sonya L. Smith welcomed nearly three dozen attendees to the New Mexico Veterans Memorial assembly room. All were wearing safety facemasks—including Secretary Smith and DVS staff in attendance—in accordance with the Memorial’s ongoing COVID safety protocol.

“This has been a long time coming,” said Secretary Smith, who was confirmed as DVS Secretary in February during the 2021 New Mexico Legislature. “I am so excited to finally meet veterans in person! DVS looks forward to resuming these important briefings. We will of course continue to monitor the pandemic, and observe all safety protocols if need be. But it’s great to be back!”

Secretary Smith outlined how, despite the challenges presented by operating during the COVID-19 pandemic, DVS was still able to focus on five critical points:

- Collaborating with the Dept. of Health and the New Mexico VA Health Care System to get the word out on COVID-19 vaccine registration
- Launching the Highly Rural Veterans Transportation Project to provide free rides for veterans to medical appointments in nine rural counties
- Raise awareness of veteran suicide and suicide prevention
- Relaunching of the agency’s women veterans program
- The opening of the Angel Fire State Veterans Cemetery.

(continued on next page)

She then outlined four immediate goals of DVS:

- Increase agency outreach
- Increase claims filing and coordination of eligible benefits
- Expand/increase interagency collaborations
- Reach out to returning troops from the Afghanistan troop drawdown

The following speakers then gave presentations highlighting achievements and goals from their agencies: New Mexico National Guard Deputy Chief of Staff Col. Dominic Dennis, New Mexico VA Health Care System (NMVACHS) newly appointed Interim Director Jean Gurga, Albuquerque VA Regional Office (VARO) newly appointed Director Cesar Romero, NMVAHCS Congressional Liaison Joe Baca, VARO Education & Training Manager Phil Maranon, Santa Fe National Cemetery Director Victor Velasquez, DVS Healthcare Coordination Director Jemia Warner, NMVAHCS Transportation Services Hugo Rodriguez and Sherry Hoff, and DVS Field Services Director Larry Campos.

Here is a link to a video of the briefing, which further highlights Secretary Smith's presentation, and the entire presentations of the guest speakers: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oX_EmVnGspQ

Four Questions & Answers:VARO Director Cesar Romero

1. Where can I get information on Veteran Readiness and Employment (Chapter 31) benefits... and can it be transferred to my spouse or children?

a) Information on Veteran Readiness and Employment (Chapter 31) benefits can be found here: [Veteran Readiness And Employment \(VR&E\) | Veterans Affairs \(va.gov\)](#)

b) Employment benefits for family members may be found here: [Employment Benefits For Dependent Family Members | Veterans Affairs \(va.gov\)](#)

2. What is the status of the records scanning for veterans records?

The VA continues to collaborate with National Archives and Records Administration and National Personnel Records Center to scan and digitalize records. The article discussing this topic can be found here: [VA and NARA to digitize federal records for Veterans | Vantage Point](#)

3. Where can I find information on the Forever GI Bill?

Information in the Forever GI Bill (Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act) can be here: [Forever GI Bill - Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act - Education and Training \(va.gov\)](#)

4. Where can I find information on the "48-month rule" (38 U.S.C. 3695)?

a)The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is committed to improving the Veteran experience by ensuring that all Veterans maximize the benefits they've earned. In alignment with this commitment, VA reviewed a long-standing interpretation of a law known informally as the "48- month rule" (38 U.S.C. 3695) and determined a more favorable interpretation of this law would help eligible Veterans maximize their education benefits. Now, Veterans who use Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) benefits prior to using any other VA education program, such as the Montgomery GI Bill or Post-9/11 GI Bill, can still use up to 48 total months of the other educational assistance benefit programs.

b) Information on the Veteran Readiness and Employment 48-month rule can be found here: [Changes to the 48 month rule for VR&E and Education Beneficiaries \(va.gov\)](#)



Meet Albuquerque VA Regional Office Director Cesar Romero

Cesar Romero was appointed as Director of the Albuquerque VA Regional Office (VARO) in May, 2021. He succeeds Sammie Quillin, who was appointed by the VA to lead the VA regional office in Little Rock, AR.

Director Romero assumes the responsibility of administering approximately \$424 million in compensation benefits for New Mexico's veterans and their families. Prior to his appointment, he served as assistant director for VA's Seattle regional office.

Cesar Romero
Director, Albuquerque VA
Regional Office

The San Diego, CA, native began his career with the VA in 2007 shortly after his honorable discharge from the United States Marine Corps--serving from 1999-2006. He was stationed at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center/ Twentynine Palms, CA, from where he served three tours of duty in Iraq and an additional tour in Okinawa, Japan.

Meet Santa Fe National Cemetery Director Victor Velasquez

Victor L Vasquez is the new Director of the Santa Fe National Cemetery (SFNC). He is responsible for all burial, maintenance, and administrative operations at the 84-acre cemetery—the final resting place for more than 68,000 fallen veterans and spouses of veterans.

A native of El Paso, TX, Mr. Vasquez began working for the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) as a cemetery caretaker in May 2015. Prior to his appointment at the SFNC, he served in a number of key senior positions at the Fort Bliss National Cemetery in his hometown of El Paso, TX. Among his duties was work leader and foreman. In these capacities, he supervised all field operations within the 82-acre cemetery--including overseeing the expansion of three new sections to accommodate the cemetery reaching the 50,000-interment mark.



Victor Velasquez
Director, Santa Fe
National Cemetery

Mr. Vasquez served 18-years as a hospital corpsman (FMF/AW) in the United States Navy. He earned an associate degree in Computer Information Systems from Edmonds Community College, a bachelor's degree from Excelsior College, and is currently pursuing his MBA from Sul Ross State University.

Meet New Mexico VA Health Care System Interim Director Jean Gurga

Jean Gurga has been appointed by the VA as interim director of the New Mexico VA Health Care System (NMVAHCS). Her appointment comes after the retirement of Andrew Welch on July 31 after a 38-year career in VA service—the last seven as the NMVAHCS director.

Ms. Gurga has been serving as director of the Northern Arizona VA Health Care System, based in Prescott, since last August. where she has been serving as the Medical Center Director since August 2020. She has 25 years of VA health care experience in Quality, Ambulatory Care, and Occupational Therapy.

Since December 2017, she has also served as the Associate Director (AD) at the Long Beach (California) VA Healthcare System. As AD, Ms. Gurga oversees facility operations for Engineering, Fiscal, Health Administration, Human Resources, and Supply Chain. She also serves as the executive in charge for Information Technology and Contracting Services for the facility.

Ms. Gurga previously served as the Chief, Office of Quality, Safety & Value (QSV) at VA Palo Alto Health Care System in the San Francisco Bay Area. She is a member of the American College of Health Care Executives. She holds a master's degree in Occupational Therapy from Tufts University - Boston School of Occupational Therapy, and a bachelor's degree in Business Economics from Mills College.

In 2017, Ms. Gurga graduated from VHA's Health Care Leadership Development Program, and in 2011 she graduated from the Partnership for Public Service's Excellence in Government Fellows Program.



Jean Gurga
Interim Director, New Mexico VA Health Care System



On July 26, DVS Secretary Sonya L. Smith presented a framed DVS commemorative poster to retiring New Mexico VA Health Care System Director Andrew Welch as a token of appreciation “...for your excellent service for New Mexico’s veterans and their families,” she said. “My only regret is that our time working together was brief. But I’m happy that you now can enjoy a well-earned retirement.”

Joining Secretary Smith at a farewell ceremony in the courtyard of the Albuquerque Raymond G. Murphy VA Hospital were (from Left to Right): DVS Women Veterans Program Manager Robin Wilson, DVS State

Benefits Director Ed Mendez, DVS Field Services Director Larry Campos, and DVS Veterans Business Outreach Center Director Rich Coffel.

Bataan Peninsula Defender William Overmier Passes Away

Former New Mexico Army National Guard WWII Bataan Peninsula defender William "Bill" Clayton Overmier passed away in his Albuquerque home on August 2. He was 101 years old, and was laid to rest August 9 at Sunset Memorial Gardens in Albuquerque.

Mr. Overmier was born in Decatur, Illinois, on February 14, 1920, the eldest son of Clayton and Hazel (Coffeen) Overmier. Due to his mother's tuberculosis, the Overmier family moved to New Mexico in 1928.

Upon graduating from Albuquerque High School in 1937, he enrolled at the University of New Mexico—and also enlisted in the New Mexico National Guard to help pay for his pursuit of an engineering degree. He became a member of the New Mexico National Guard's 200th Coast Artillery Unit/Battery B...also known as "The Regiment." On January 6, 1941, the Regiment was federalized, and seven months later Tech Sgt. Overmier and the rest of the unit were selected for overseas assignment and stationed at Fort Stotsenberg near Clark Field in the Philippines.

Just hours the December 7, 1941 Pearl Harbor surprise attack, Japan then attacked the Philippines—and Clark Field. For nearly four months, 75,000 American and Filipino forces fought courageously against the larger and better-equipped attackers. On April 9, 1942, the men were ordered by Allied command to surrender. Mr. Overmier, however, initially escaped imprisonment and went into hiding. The American and Filipino soldiers were rounded up and forced to march 50-miles to prison camps. Many died or were killed along this "death march." Mr. Overmier was eventually captured a month later off the island of Corregidor and sent to Japan as a prisoner of war to work in the Mitsubishi shipyards and coal mines for the next three and a half years—finally gaining freedom after Japan surrendered to end the war on August 15, 1945.

Upon returning from the war, Mr. Overmier returned to Albuquerque and earned a bachelor's degree in civil engineering. He served as president of the New Mexico Home Builders Association and was an active member with them as well as the New Mexico Builder's Trust for many years--finally retiring in 2000 at the age of 80.



**William Clayton
"Bill" Overmier**
Feb. 14, 1920-Aug. 2, 2021

Mr. Overmier is survived by his wife, Anna Lee; sons Alan, Richard, and Charles; and daughter Lynne—all from Albuquerque; daughter Teri Overmier of Portland, OR; his brother Jack of Los Alamos; nine grandchildren; 14 great-grandchildren, with one more expected soon; and one great-great-granddaughter.

With his passing, only four of the 1,800 New Mexico Guardsmen Bataan defenders are still alive: Richard J. Daly of Santa Fe, Valdemar DeHerrera (Gallup), Rosendo Lovato (Gallup), and Don Lucero (Augusta, ME).



New Mexico Army National Guard Maj. Gen. Ken Nava, the Adjutant General of New Mexico, presents the folded American flag used to drape the casket of William Overmier...to Mr. Overmier's widow Anna Lee. The couple was married for 75 years.



US Marine Cpl. Rick Everington (left) donates a special Con Thien poster to Vietnam Veterans Memorial at Angel Fire Manger DB Herbst.

Marine Donates Special Poster to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire

Vietnam Veteran and U.S. Marine Corps Cpl. Rick Everington stopped by the DVS-managed Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire on August 6 to donate a special poster to the memorial's museum.

The poster is one of two made for the USMC 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, 3rd Division/Delta Company's 2016 Landing Zone/ Loon Hill 484 reunion in North Carolina. That unit's Commanding Officer, Lt. Michael E. Jackson, graduated from basic training's TBS (The Basic School) with Albuquerque native David Westphall in 1967. The two were commissioned together and then served in Vietnam at the same time—Lt. Westphall serving with Bravo Company.

On May 22, 1968, Bravo Company was ambushed by enemy forces. Lt. Westphall and 16 fellow Marines were killed when Bravo Company was ambushed near Con Thien, South Vietnam. Lt. Westphall's grief-stricken parents Victor and Jeanne created the memorial in Angel Fire as a tribute to their son and all who served in Vietnam. It was completed in 1971--on the third-year anniversary of their son's death. The memorial was the nation's first Vietnam War memorial, and served as an inspiration for others to build the national Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C.

Following that 2016 Delta Company reunion, the members felt compelled to donate one of the two reunion posters to the Angel Fire memorial.

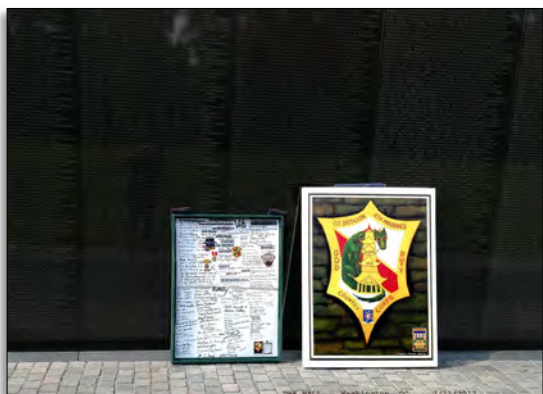
"DVS is honored to accept the donation of this very special poster," said Vietnam Veterans Memorial Museum Manager and fellow Marine DB Herbst. "We are humbled, and would like to thank Delta Company for this generous gesture."

The poster depicts the unofficial shield and logo that was used at Con Thien. On the shield is a dragon on a pagoda--which represents the 1st Battalion 4th Marines service in China ins 1927. This is when the unit was given the title "China Marines" and started using the Chinese dragon on its logos and mastheads.



In the spring of 1965, the 1st Battalion 4th Marines were deployed to Vietnam, and adopted this shield as its unofficial logo.

In 2017, Everington took this poster to the National Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C. [\(left photo\)](#)



Local Vietnam Veterans Group Seeking Donations to Help Build Angel Fire Replica Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall



The non-profit veterans service organization *Vietnam Veterans of America/Northern New Mexico Chapter 996* is seeking donations to help build a half-scale replica of the national Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall for the DVS-managed Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire.

VVA Northern New Mexico Chapter 996 and DVS are working together on the memorial wall project and hope to have it completed next year.



To Make a Donation

VVA Northern New Mexico Chapter 996 is a congressionally-chartered 501(c)19 nonprofit organization. Donations for the building of the replica wall can be made by going to a special website dedicated by the chapter to help with fundraising for the wall effort:

www.vietnammemorial.net

Your donations are tax-deductible.

The Wall That Heals



San Juan College Athletic Fields

September 9th – 12th, 2021

Open 24 hours a day, free to public

Honor Ceremony, September 9th, 6 pm

Navajo Blessing Ceremony, September 11th, 9am

Closes Sunday, September 12th at 2pm



Facebook.com/The-Wall-That-Heals-Farmington-NM

**Sponsored by Pinon Hills Seventh-day Adventist Church,
Farmington Chick-fil-A, and the Four Corners Blue Star Mothers**

Albuquerque's New Mexico Veterans Memorial Seeking Volunteers



New Mexico Veterans' Memorial

"A PLACE AND A PURPOSE"

*LOOKING FOR A PLACE THAT VALUES
IT'S VOLUNTEERS?*

CONTACT OUR VICE PRESIDENT JIM LEHNER
AT LEHNERJAMES@COMCAST.NET
OR BY PHONE AT (505) 250-3483

SUPPORT HELPS KEEP OUR VISITOR CENTER AND
MUSEUM OPEN AND OUR GROUNDS KEPT.

1100 Louisiana Blvd SE · Albuquerque · NM · 87108





September 14 is *Military & Veterans Day at the State Fair*

Military veterans, National Guard/Reserve, and active-duty service members will be admitted free to the New Mexico State Fair for *Military and Veterans Day at the State Fair* on September 14.

This annual day at the state fair in Albuquerque is presented by the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services, the New Mexico National Guard, and the New Mexico State Fair to honor and thank the men and women who have served our country as members of the United States Armed Forces. Veterans, National Guard/Reserve personnel, and retirees must present either a valid Uniformed Services Retiree Identification Card, a veterans-designation driver's license, VA Veteran Health ID Card, or a copy of their DD-214 Separation Papers at the gate in order to obtain the free admission. Active-duty personnel must show a valid Uniformed Services ID card.

Non-veteran/non-military spouses or family members are not eligible for the free admission. Free parking can be found at the Gate 8 parking lot--which is the infield parking lot located inside the Downs racetrack. Gate 8 is on Louisiana Blvd. In addition to the numerous rides and attractions at the state fair, there will be dozens of booths, exhibits and information tables along "Main Street" staffed by the New Mexico National Guard, veterans' organizations, and other community service groups.

State Benefits Division Eligibility Interviewer Sylvia Varela Honored as DVS Employee of the Quarter

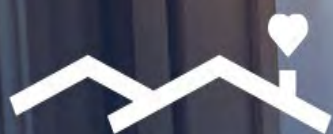
(nominated by State Benefits Division Bureau Chief Jeff George)

Sylvia Varela is often the first person a veteran talks to when contacting the DVS state benefits division. She goes out of her way to assist veterans—whether over the phone, through email responses, or in-person office visits. She is an invaluable team member in the state benefits division who, after completing her tasks, will ask others if they need help with their tasks.

Over this last quarter, Sylvia has quickly adapted to the ever-changing COVID-19 protocols—and has helped others to adapt. As we continued to telework, she re-mastered numerous state benefits applications sent to the division into editable PDFs, and was a key asset during the reformatting of these applications. As a result, the division never missed a beat in processing state benefits applications.

Sylvia has developed strong relationships with counties throughout New Mexico in order to help veterans or unmarried widows of veterans with filing for the veterans property tax exemption or waiver. This past quarter, she initiated a program with Santa Fe County to provide extensions allowing extra time for filers to submit missing necessary documentation for their sent applications. This extension allowed us to process these applications.

In addition, over the past quarter, Sylvia assisted in the training and development of a new critical employee in our division—showing this employee how to properly review documents for eligibility, and how to properly enter documents into various databases. Sylvia is a model of efficiency and proficiency, and takes tremendous pride in her work. DVS is proud and grateful to have her on our team.



**NEW MEXICO,
DO YOU NEED HELP
PAYING YOUR RENT?**

WE CAN HELP.

**LEARN MORE AT
[RENTHELPM.ORG](https://renthelpnm.org)**



**Emergency
Rental
Assistance
Program**

Veterans Community Bulletin Board

NOTICE: The following page(s) feature event and informational flyers provided to DVS by veterans and community service agencies. These flyers are published for the convenience of New Mexico's veteran community. Inclusion in The Guardian does not constitute an endorsement by DVS of the organization, content, products, or services contained therein.

DVS invites service agencies and non-profit service organizations to send flyers or news releases announcing an upcoming or ongoing veteran-related event. DVS will post these flyers as a public service courtesy to the veteran community. However:

- Flyers must have the name of a point-of-contact from the organization...along with the contact's phone number or email address. Flyers without this information will not be published.
- DVS is not responsible for the accuracy of the content, products, or services in these flyers.
- Views expressed in these flyers are the independent views of the authors/owners of the third-party entity that created the flyer—and does not necessarily reflect the views of DVS.
- To the maximum extent permitted by law, DVS expressly denies liability for any and all losses suffered by any persons or organizations who, in their independent discretion and reliance, either directly or indirectly rely on content, products, services or information offered by these independent third-party organizations.
- DVS reserves the right to edit or decline publishing of any flyer.



WOMEN VETERANS UNITED COMMITTEE, INC.

Dr. JoAnn Fisher, CEO

Supported by: The Veterans Mental Health Advisory Council
at the DC Veterans Affairs Medical Center

**WE ARE LISTENING!
WE HEAR YOU!
WE ARE HERE TO HELP!**

2021 Men – Mental Health, PTS, MST

MD DAV Omaha Beach Chapter #7

8205 Laurel Bowie Road, Bowie, MD 20715

August 14, 2021 • 1 pm – 4 pm

Biogenetics Research & PTS and Research
Claims & Benefits Service Officers
Suicide Intervention/Prevention
Domestic Violence Warriors to Soul Mate
Military Sexual Trauma
Intimate Partner Violence

For More Information Contact:
Aaron Terry, 240-579-3909

If you can't make it in person, join via ZOOM:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81268092728?pwd=OUZtRXRSS3h5WU1yaGV0cVpWVytYUT09>

Meeting ID: 812 6809 2728

Passcode: 130525

One tap mobile

+13017158592,,81268092728#,,,,*130525# US (Washington DC)

Topics to be Covered:

Biogenetics Research

PTS & Research

Claims & Benefits Assistance

Suicide Intervention/Prevention

Domestic Violence Warriors to Soul Mate

Military Sexual Trauma

Intimate Partner Violence

For more information, please contact :

Aaron Terry (240) 579-3909

From the New Mexico VA Health Care System...

Join Us!

**We are looking for 10 Native American
Veteran women who are enrolled in
the NM VA Health Care System to
participate in a Women's Focus Group on
August 23, 2021 from 10am- 11 am**

If you are interested, please contact :
Pamela at pamela.pickering@va.gov or
Paula at paula.aragon@va.gov

We will send you a confirmation reserving your spot.
The group will meet virtually. A follow up email will be
sent to confirm your participation along with a phone
number to call into.

Free Civil Legal Advice *for Veterans*

June 1, 2021 • Sept. 14, 2021 • Nov. 9, 2021

**Via confidential phone call on your
phone between 8:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.**

- Family Law (divorce, custody/
visitation, child support)
- Consumer Rights
- Bankruptcy
- Landlord-Tenant
- Foreclosure
- Employment

Phone calls are on a sign-up only basis. Help is contingent on volunteer attorneys.
If you have any further questions, please contact the
Veterans Justice Outreach Program at 505-206-9086.



State Bar of New Mexico
Young Lawyers Division

The Military Officers Association of America



Are you on active duty? In the Guard or Reserve? Retired? Former military service? Looking to connect with other like-minded military types? Look no further than the Albuquerque chapter of the Military Officers Association of America. MOAA, headquartered in Washington DC, is the nation's largest and most influential military association with 350,000 members, and is an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization fighting for your rights and benefits representing you in Congress.

WE WANT YOU! Membership is open to active duty, former, retired, and National Guard and Reserve commissioned and warrant officers of the uniformed services and their spouses. **The skills you learned in the military can help our chapter.**

WHAT IS THE ALBUQUERQUE CHAPTER OF MOAA?

We focus on the state and local needs of our members. Through our Charitable Giving Program, we support scholarships, achievement awards, and donate to veteran-related charities. Those charities have included the local chapters of the Blue Star Mothers of America, Gold Star Mothers of America, Honor Flight of Northern New Mexico, Veterans' Integration Center, Fisher House, and NM Adaptive Sports Programs. Donations are tax deductible.

Please visit our website (www.albumoaa.org) to learn about Chapter events and activities, and read our newsletter. *Our Legislative Affairs Committee actively advocates for state legislation of benefit to veterans, retirees and spouses, and uniformed members.* We have a Breakfast Club, a large and active Ski Club, and numerous tour and entertainment opportunities. If you are looking to reconnect with military friends, joining the chapter will provide a host of activities for you. **THERE IS SOMETHING FOR EVERYBODY.**

The Board meets monthly and holds an annual meeting and social event. We are always looking for new members, and have openings for a Chaplain, Navy and Space Command Reps, and others. Members from all branches, including their spouses, are needed to serve in management, technical, financial, and operations positions. Keep your mind active! Join the Board.

MEMBERSHIP

Albuquerque MOAA offers several categories of membership.

Regular Member: Anyone who is serving or has served in any branch, or served in one of the National Guard or Reserve Components as a commissioned or warrant officer. Dues \$24/year.

Surviving Spouse Member: Widows and widowers whose spouse, if living, would be eligible for Regular membership. Dues \$12/year.

Associate Member: Others who support the mission of MOAA but would not otherwise be eligible for membership and who wish to participate in one or more of the MOAA activities. Dues \$15/year.

To join, go to www.albumoaa.org and click on the **join** link. If you have questions, please email our Board Secretary, Marsha Thole at secretary@moaa.org.



News from the VA



VA Assures Access to Health Care as 9/11 Anniversary Approaches

As the 20th anniversary of the September 11 Terrorist Attacks approaches, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is providing those who served awareness of and access to all their health care services, specifically in areas of mental health and post-traumatic stress care.

VA Mental Health officials said there has been an uptick in Veterans seeking help, which could increase more as they come to terms with their service and as the Afghanistan withdrawal comes to completion.

“Our nation is indebted to the men and women who served in Afghanistan and Iraq, because they made our world infinitely safer,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “Their service did not come without sacrifice as some carry physical and emotional wounds. We must ensure they get the world-class care they’ve earned and deserve.”

VA’s Vantage Point blog (<https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/92731/afghanistan-how-veterans-can-learn-from-vietnam-veterans/>) is running a four-part series on Afghanistan featuring veterans’ thoughts and perspectives on their time there and the drawdown. The series will run each Tuesday until completed. The series focuses on:

- Recognizing warning signs of posttraumatic stress.
- How spouses, family members and friends can respond to and assist someone with PTSD.
- Where and how to get help within VA.
- Mobile apps and tips for recovery.
-

“Our purpose for being there was to prevent further attacks on the homeland,” said Chief Master Sgt. Ramón Colón-López. Colón-López is an Air Force pararescue man who served in Afghanistan and is currently the senior enlisted adviser to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

He adds his fellow service members should be proud of their actions over the last 20 years but also be cognizant of any mental health difficulties.

Colón-López spent years hiding and ignoring his PTSD, which led to heavy drinking and reckless behavior. It wasn’t until he had a mountain biking accident that his wife gave him an ultimatum to get help.

“Veterans should be on the lookout for red flags if news of Afghanistan starts changing behavior,” said the Director of the National Center for PTSD Consultation Program Sonya Norman, Ph.D. “These include isolating, using alcohol and drugs or any increase in unhealthy behaviors compared to normal.”

(continued on next page)

Dr. Norman points out excessive working or video game playing could be signs someone is struggling and needs help. The series provides information on Vet Centers, which were created after the Vietnam War and addresses the parallels between conflicts and how they can help through readjustment counseling.

“I’ve got Vietnam Veterans who are still coming here, not because we failed to resolve any issue in their life, but because they found a home in the community,” said Director of the Las Vegas Vet Center Joe Lasky. “They found friendships and a way to come talk and deal with issues that may have started in Vietnam, but now affect their current health.”

Lasky added he’s seen a willingness among Vietnam Veterans to mentor more recent veterans. Decades removed from their own service; many will offer advice to younger veterans to not repeat mistakes they might have made.

About 1.9 million post-9/11 era Veterans are enrolled for care.

The full four-part series on Afghanistan is available the VA Vantage Point blog: <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/92731/afghanistan-how-veterans-can-learn-from-vietnam-veterans/>

VA Appoints More Veterans Law Judges to Adjudicate More Appeals for Veterans

The VA’s Board of Veterans’ Appeals has appointed 20 new Veterans Law Judges to deliver more veterans appeals decisions — bringing the total to 113 VLJs.

Most of the new VLJs will arrive prior to the end of fiscal year 2021, with additional judges to be appointed in fiscal year 2022. This should further VA’s effort to deliver enhanced benefits and services to veterans.

“Veterans Law Judges are a key part of ensuring veterans receive the benefits and services they have earned and deserve,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “Once I swear in the new judges, this puts in place added resources to reduce the appeals inventory.”

The judges will receive extensive training from seasoned mentor judges to prepare them for their new responsibilities and will be supported by a cadre of attorney-advisors and professional staff as they adjudicate appeals.

To find the status of a claim, appeal, or decision review:

<https://www.va.gov/claim-or-appeal-status/>

To learn more about opting into virtual hearings:

https://www.bva.va.gov/docs/VirtualHearing_FactSheet.pdf

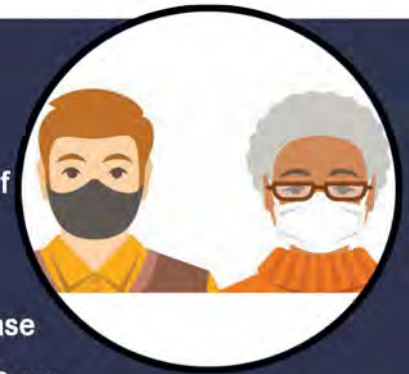
Go to VA’s Board of Veterans’ Appeals site <https://www.bva.va.gov/> for additional information.

From the New Mexico VA Health Care System...regarding the Murphy VA Hospital, CBOCs, and Vet Centers...

Your Safety

Visitation Policy Reminder

- * Visitors are currently limited to only ONE per appointment, and only if you require assistance.
- * No visitors to inpatient areas are allowed without prior approval. Please contact your provider to request approval. Those under the age of 18 are not allowed to visit or accompany outpatients.
- * Veterans coming for outpatient appointments, including outpatient procedures may have ONE person (over 18 years) accompanying them for assistance with decision making, mobility, care giving and/or emotional support.
- * Persons under 18 may accompany a patient being dropped off, but must not exit the vehicle. Please do not leave children unattended. Waiting in vehicles is not allowed.
- * All visitors will be screened prior to entry and must screen negative to enter.
- * All visitors are required to wear a face mask at all times while on campus and please keep a physical distance of 6 feet.



We appreciate your understanding and assistance in limiting exposure and risk to you, your family and the VA Staff. Please be patient as we are all in this together.

is our mission!



DVS Offices Are Open for In-Person Assistance—By Appointment Only

DVS offices are open for in-person visits for veterans or their eligible dependents to get assistance with filing VA claims, filing for state veterans benefits, or for anything that a veteran or his/her family may need help.

DVS has formed partnerships with federal, state, local, and private agencies and organizations all dedicated to helping veterans and their families.

All DVS office visits are on an appointment-only basis.

Office hours are Monday-Friday from 8am-5pm, Monday-Friday. Veterans or their eligible dependents ***must*** make an appointment with a DVS veterans service officer (VSO) via the contact information on the following page.

DVS VSOs are also continuing to offer the same assistance by email or phone. Veterans from anywhere in the state can contact any DVS VSO for assistance.

With the COVID-19 virus and new variants still posing a health thread, DVS is requiring all unvaccinated veterans or their eligible dependents who visit DVS offices to wear a protective facemask. DVS staff will observe COVID-19 six-foot social distancing and will clean & disinfect the office in-between customer visits.

The following page has the locations and contact information for DVS offices and veterans service officers in New Mexico. Also on the list is the contact information for:

- the DVS women veterans program
 - dedicated to helping women veterans
- the DVS state benefits division
- the New Mexico Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC)
 - free expert business counseling for veterans wanting to open, expand, or purchase a small business

Alamogordo VSO**Larry Weatherwax**

411 Tenth St. #107

(575) 491-3127

larry.weatherwax@state.nm.us**Albuquerque VSO (NE Heights)****Victoria Bader**

5201 Eagle Rock Blvd. NE

(505) 225-5253

victoria.bader@state.nm.us**Albuquerque VSO (NE Heights)****Johnny Martinez**

5201 Eagle Rock Blvd. NE

(505) 274-3609

johnW.martinez2@state.nm.us**Albuquerque VSO (Downtown)****George Vargas**

500 Gold Ave. SW

(575) 520-2634

george.vargas@state.nm.us**Carlsbad VSO****Dagmar Youngberg**

101 N. Halagueno

(575) 988-5900

dagmar.youngberg@state.nm.us**Clovis VSO****Matt Barela**

904 W. Sixth St.

(575) 825-9602

matthew.barela@state.nm.us**Farmington VSO****Beverly Charley**

San Juan College Veteran Center

(505) 327-2861

beverly.charley@state.nm.us**Gallup VSO****Durrell Tsosie**

908 E. Buena Vista Ave./Room 1A

(505) 218-0348

durrell.Tsosie@state.nm.us**Gallup VSO****Benjamin Stewart**

908 E. Buena Vista Ave./Room 1A

(575) 386-7911

benjamin.stewart@state.nm.us**Grants VSO****George Garcia**

515 West High St./Suite C

(505) 288-7605

george.garcia2@state.nm.us**Hobbs VSO****Dalton Boyd**

2120 N. Alto

(575) 241-0714

dalton.boyd2@state.nm.us**Las Cruces VSO****Rosa Bycenski***(temporarily offering email or phone assistance for now)* (505) 216-8782rosa.bycenski@state.nm.us**Las Vegas, NM VSO****Martín Márquez**

917 Douglas Ave.

(575) 520-5079

martinM.marquez@state.nm.us**Las Vegas, NM VSO****Arturo Marlow**

917 Douglas Ave.

(505) 331-8838

arturo.marlow@state.nm.us**Rio Rancho VSO****Dustin Newsom***(temporarily offering email or phone assistance for now)* (505) 221-7190dustin.newsom@state.nm.us**Roswell VSO****Danielle Thompson***(temporarily offering email or phone assistance for now)*danielle.thompson@state.nm.us**Santa Fe VSO**

Bataan Memorial Bldg/1st floor

407 Galisteo St.

*(Temporarily vacant. Please contact the DVS Rio Rancho office for In-person assistance)***Women Veterans Program/VSO****Robin Wilson**

5201 Eagle Rock Blvd. NE

(505) 372-9106

robin.wilson@state.nm.us**State Benefits Division****Jeff George**

Bataan Memorial Bldg/1st floor

Santa Fe/407 Galisteo St. Rm 134

(505) 827-6300

jeff.george@state.nm.us**Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC)-Albuquerque****Rich Coffel**

5201 Eagle Rock Blvd. NE

(505) 220-9932

richardL.coffel@state.nm.us**VBOC-So. & SE New Mexico***(located in the DVS Roswell Office)***James Cassidy**

1600 SE Main St./Suite A

(575) 228-3024

jamesM.cassidy@state.nm.us