



The Guardian

The monthly newsletter of the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services

Veterans Day Celebrated Throughout the State



Santa Fe Veterans Day ceremony at the city's Veterans Memorial

November, 2021

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Veterans Day was celebrated throughout the state on November 11—and in some cases, a few days before or after the date—as communities resumed celebrations a year after events were cancelled due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Santa Fe, New Mexico Department of Veterans Services (DVS) Cabinet Secretary Sonya Smith was a guest speaker at the city's annual Veterans Day ceremony at the Santa Fe Veterans Memorial.

Secretary Smith joined keynote speaker Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernandez, Santa Fe Mayor Alan Webber, and Maj. Gen. Ken Nava, the adjutant general of New Mexico, in honoring the service and sacrifice of veterans for our nation.

“As we pause to honor our veterans today, let us also take a moment to thank our veteran and military families,” she said. “The spouses and children of our military are the thread that keeps our armed forces quilt together.”

The secretary referenced a quilt by members of the *Santa Fe Quilts of Valor* presented to a veteran in gratitude for his work in Santa Fe's veteran community. The secretary added that about 430,000 military families relocate every year—posing hardships for the military family unit.

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The ceremony was presented by the city of Santa Fe and the city's veterans advisory board—with help from Vietnam Veterans of American/Northern New Mexico Chapter 996, VFW Post 2951, American Legion Posts 1 & 12, the American Legion Auxilliary, and the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services.



DVS Cabinet Secretary Sonya L. Smith



U.S. Rep. Teresa Leger Fernandez (D-New Mexico)



U.S. Army veteran Jim Williams, a member of the Santa Fe Veterans Advisory Board, was presented with a quilt of valor from the Northern New Mexico Quilt Guild...in appreciation for his work on the advisory board.



Retired Army Command Sgt. Major Billie Russell was presented with the *Outstanding Service to Veterans Award* from Vietnam Veterans of American/Northern New Mexico Chapter 996. CSM Russell formed *Tugan 3 Vets*—an informal veterans group that meets monthly offering veterans a chance to talk about any issues needing to be addressed.

DVS has produced a video highlighting remarks by Secretary Smith and other guest speakers in the ceremony:

<https://youtu.be/A9BR6OjAoe0>.

DVS Co-Hosts Two-Day Veterans Day Film Series in Santa Fe

DVS, Warrior Films, and the Jean Cocteau Cinema presented *A Veterans Journey Home* two-day film series on Veterans Day at the historical downtown Santa Fe theater.

Filmmaker Frederick Marx presented five films: *Solutions*, *Ben's Story*, *On Black Mountain*, *Kalani's Story*, and *Leaving It On The Land*—each film telling a story of readjustment by combat veterans back home from the battlefield.

“We are very proud to bring these stories to you,” said DVS Cabinet Secretary Sonya Smith during a Veterans Day evening pre-screening reception ([top photo](#)). “These films show us some incredible journeys which we think can inspire other veterans who might be facing the same situations.”



U.S. Senator Ben Ray Lujan also attended Thursday's evening reception, where he thanked Marx for shining a positive light on the readjustment struggles facing many returning combat veterans.

The senator also presented a copy of the Congressional Record to World War II veteran Bennie Montoya of Santa Fe ([left photo](#)), who attended the reception. The document, which is the official daily record of the proceedings when Congress is in session, documents the day this summer when Senator Lujan honored Montoya by speaking about him on the senate floor on the veteran's 100th birthday.



ABOVE PHOTO: Members of the Santa Fe County 4-H Club attended the reception to welcome WWII veteran Bennie Montoya. **RIGHT PHOTO:** The 4-H members also met DVS Secretary Sonya Smith ([middle row/far right](#))



DVS Helps Organize Pre-Veterans Day Parade at the State Veterans Home

On November 6, DVS, New Mexico State Police, and the New Mexico Department of Health collaborated to organize a special pre-Veterans Day parade to honor residents and staff of the New Mexico State Veterans Home in Truth or Consequences.

The noon parade featured 63 vehicles from law enforcement and first responder agencies from throughout the state—along with more vehicles and motorcycles from veterans service organizations. Residents who were physically able to make it outside sat in chairs as the law enforcement and first responder vehicles drove by—most with sirens pulsing and lights flashing. DVS Secretary Sonya Smith and DVS Event Coordinator Joseph Dorn, one of the main coordinators of the parade, rode in a vintage New Mexico State Police car.



“The months of planning...the phone calls, zoom meetings and emails...when I saw the looks and reactions from the veterans, it was all worth it,” said Mr. Dorn. “We are all proud to be able to do this for them. They deserve recognition on Veterans Day.”

“I thought it was great,” said 89-year old Korean War veteran Joe Eiken. “They’re saying hello...and kinda saying they appreciate us. I thought it was really nice...yeah.”

Prior to the parade, DVS gave each resident a warm fleece blanket (*right photo*), a DVS agency pin, a New Mexico veterans lapel pin, and a note from DVS Cabinet Secretary Sonya Smith thanking them for their service and sacrifice for our country.



DVS has produced a short video highlighting the state veteran home parade:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3p857qtpiP8&t=16s>

A Look at Other Veterans Day Events in New Mexico...

Albuquerque (Fairview Cemetery)



LEFT PHOTO: On November 6, members of the American Legion Post 10763 and Boy Scouts Troop 442 placed American flags on gravesites at the historic Fairview Cemetery. (photo courtesy of VFW State Jr. Vice Commander Victoria Haddox)



RIGHT PHOTO: On Veterans Day, DVS State Approving Agency Consultant Kathy Snyder (at right) joined her fellow Daughters of the American Revolution/Lew Wallace Chapter members to honor veterans buried at the Fairview Cemetery. In the photo, she and Chapter Regent Helen Beatty are honoring a gravesite of a Buffalo Soldier—African American U.S. Army soldiers who mainly served on the western frontier following our nation's Civil War. (photo courtesy: Kathy Snyder)

Albuquerque (New Mexico Veterans Memorial)



LEFT: Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham (standing at far right of line at the left) and Albuquerque Mayor Tim Keller (standing next to the governor) attended the city of Albuquerque's annual Veterans Day Ceremony at the New Mexico Veterans Memorial.



RIGHT: The governor thanked veterans and their families during her keynote address. (photo courtesy: The New Mexico Veterans Memorial)

Albuquerque (New Mexico Veterans Memorial-continued)



Dept. of New Mexico Military Order of the Purple Heart State Commander Pete Comstock (**left photo**) and New Mexico National Guard Brig. Gen. Jamison Herrera (**right photo**) present a memorial plaque and brick, respectively) to Brandi Lewark, widow of New Mexico Army National Guard Pvt. 1st Class Walter Lewark.

Pfc Lewark, of Mountainair, died February 13, 2020, in a non-combat related incident at Camp Lemonnier, in the eastern African country of Djibouti. The presentations were delayed a year due to the cancellation of last year's Veterans Day ceremony due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

(photo courtesy: The New Mexico Veterans Memorial)



Albuquerque (Westside)



Veterans were treated to a free Veterans Appreciation Breakfast at the offices of the West Central Community Development Group, a non-profit organization that advocates for community and economic development in Albuquerque's west-central corridor. The breakfast was hosted by city councilors Lan Sena, Cynthia Borrego, and Klarissa Peña. *(photo courtesy: Rachel Hernandez/policy analyst for Councilor Peña)*

Albuquerque (Indian Pueblo Cultural Center)



DVS Acting Field Services Division Director George Vargas was a speaker at the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center's Veterans Day ceremony.

On Veterans Day, the center pauses during its annual month-long celebration in November of Native American Heritage Month to honor Native Americans who have served in the United States military. According to VA, there are more than 9,800 Native American veterans in New Mexico.

Angel Fire



This year's annual Veterans Day ceremony at the DVS-managed Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire was moved indoors due to cold weather at the 8,400-foot elevation site. The Presentation of Colors was performed by Vietnam Veterans of American/Northern New Mexico Chapter 996, which travelled all the way from Santa Fe to do the honors. The guest speaker was retired USAF Colonel and former New Mexico Department of Homeland Security Cabinet Secretary Jay Mitchell.

(left photo courtesy of Matthew Wohlberg; right photo courtesy of Vietnam Veterans Memorial Manager DB Herbst)

Artesia (Nov. 13)



RIGHT: DVS Carlsbad-based Veterans Service Officer Dagmar Youngberg set up a benefits outreach table at the city of Artesia's "Boots & Badges" Appreciation Event at Sun Country Homes & Gardens—a day of food & activities to show appreciation for veterans and law enforcement members.



LEFT: Ms. Youngberg also brought along "Red"—an emergency service dog she is training and will eventually hand over to a veteran in need of a service dog. "Red is doing really well.," said Ms. Youngberg. "He is going to make a fantastic service and companion dog."

Carlsbad (Veterans Memorial Park)



LEFT: U.S. Army Vietnam War veterans Dennis Bankson (2nd from left) and Tim Messett (far left) were the special guest speakers at the city of Carlsbad's annual Veterans Day ceremony. Bankson was flying a Huey helicopter over South Vietnam when it was shot down on June 23, 1969. Though shot in the neck, he survived the crash and was evacuated by American soldiers. Messett flew one of several helicopters involved in that rescue effort. **RIGHT PHOTO:** Bankson's restored Huey is the helicopter on permanent display at the city's Veterans Memorial Park. (photo courtesy: Kyle Marksteiner)

Corrales



In Corrales VFW Post 5432 held a ceremony at the Corrales Veteran's Memorial in La Entrada Park. Members of Scouts BSA Boy Troop 714 and Girl Troop 1919, Corrales Village officials, family members, and members of the public attended. Commander Terry Brown began the program by ringing a bell 11 times to recognize Armistice Day (now Veterans Day) ending World War I. Brown expressed the importance of remembering all Veterans, living and dead who served our country.

Scouts BSA Troop member, Hannah Opel, who won the Post's Patriots Pen competition closed the ceremony by reading her essay titled "How Can I Be a Good American." (photo courtesy: Terry Brown)

Gallup



The University of New Mexico-Gallup's Veterans Resource Center exhibited the uniforms of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard as part of a *Military Uniform Display* honoring the professionalism of the United States Armed Forces.

Along with the uniforms were photos of Gallup-area veterans and a brief description of their service and accomplishments while in the military. *(photo courtesy: Nick Brokeshoulder/UNM-Gallup VRC Manager)*

Hobbs



Veterans in Hobbs celebrated with a grand opening of a new VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC). The new 11,000 square foot facility replaces the old clinic in the Garey Tower that was in need of major repairs. The new facility is in the former Bealls department store at 1201 North Turner Street that underwent a \$2.1 million remodel. It is under the jurisdiction of the West Texas VA Health Care System based in Abilene, TX. *(photo courtesy: State Rep. Randall Pettigrew/R-Lea County)*

Las Cruces-Nov. 6 (Downtown)



LEFT: Las Cruces Mayor Ken Miyagishima honors U.S. Army Col. (Ret) Paul Roach with a medallion. The 94-year old former Korean War Prisoner of War still serves as the co-chair of the city's Veterans Memorial Wall Foundation.

RIGHT: Maria Lucero watches proudly as her father, WWII U.S. Army Sgt. Simón Mendoza, is greeted by White Sands Missile Range Brig. Gen. Eric Little and WSMR Command Sgt. Maj. José Melendez. The 99-year old Mendoza still proudly remembers the day when he was pinned with a Bronze Star medal by Gen. Douglas MacArthur for bravery during the Invasion of Lingayen Gulf in the Philippines. *(photo credits: Miriam Rodriguez/WSMR Public Affairs Office)*

Las Cruces-Nov. 10 (VFW Post 10124)



VFW Post 10124 hosted a Stand Down for Homeless Veterans offering free food, backpacks, clothing, housing assistance, hair cuts, and other service by local organizations and charities. Albuquerque VA Regional Office Director Cesar Romero was on site and processed eight disability claims and one Veteran Readiness & Employment application. *(left photo courtesy: Len Hampton/VFW, Dept. of NM; right photo courtesy: Cesar Romero/Albuquerque VARO director)*

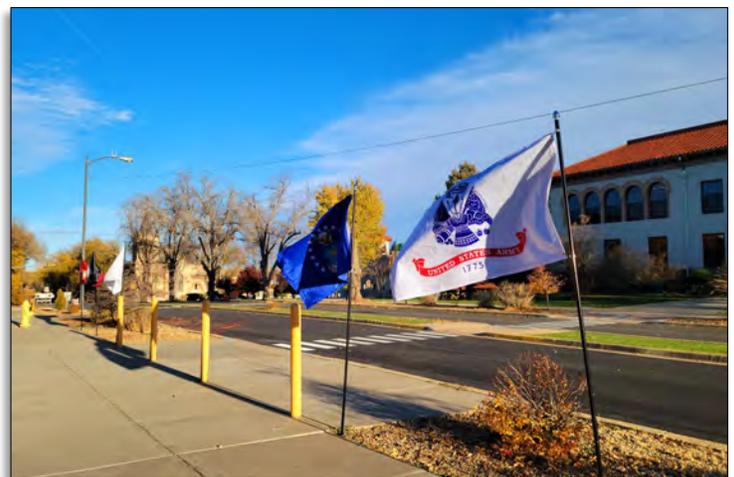
Las Cruces (Mesilla Valley of Hope)



The staff of the Mesilla Valley Community of Hope's program for formerly homeless veterans was treated to a Veterans Day BBQ by the American Legion Post 10 Ladies Auxiliary.

The Mesilla Valley Community of Hope is a 501 3c non-profit organization that provides shelter and services for homeless and near-homeless individuals in the Las Cruces area. It operates a 22-unit housing complex for homeless Veterans and has an onsite service provider to help the veterans receive the services they need. Many community partners come together to help make the program successful. *(photo courtesy: Nicole Martinez/Executive Director, Mesilla Valley Community of Hope)*

Las Vegas, NM



New Mexico Highlands University proudly displayed service branch flags at various part of the campus. *(photo courtesy: Michelle Bencomo/NMHU Student Relations Coordinator/School of Business Instructor)*



The town of Los Alamos celebrated Veterans Day with a ceremony hosted by American Legion Post 90. Members of the Los Alamos High School JROTC Color Guard presented the colors (*right photo*). Members of local Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts troops joined members of other local veterans service organizations to form a flag line. The keynote address was given by Los Alamos National Laboratory Associate Director for Environment, Safety, Health, Quality, Safeguards and Security Col. Michael W. Hazen (USAF/retired). (*photo courtesy: Jim Mariner/Past American Legion National Historian*)

Questa



A Veterans Day ceremony on September 13 at Carlos R. Cisneros Veterans Memorial Park in Questa honored veterans from Questa and the neighboring towns of Cerro, Red River, and Costilla. The park was renamed this summer in honor of the late state senator from Questa, who was a strong supporter of veterans and veteran issues in the state legislature. (*photo courtesy: Matthew Wohlberg/UNM-Taos*)

Rio Rancho



Residents of Rio Rancho were treated to a Veterans Day parade featuring more than 30 organizations riding in honor of veterans. The parade began at the intersection of Country Club and Oakmount Drives, and concluded with a ceremony at Veterans Memorial Park.

91-year old Korean War veteran Carl Ferris was a special guest at the ceremony. Mr. Ferris saw action at the Battle of Chosin Reservoir in North Korea. Temperatures during the 16-day battle in late November-early December dipped to -36 degrees Fahrenheit. *(photo courtesy: Victoria Haddox/ VFW state junior vice commander)*

Roswell



Roswell High School held a public Veterans Day ceremony featuring the posting of Colors by the New Mexico Youth Challenge Academy Color Guard **(LEFT PHOTO)**...



...and a performance by the New Mexico Military Institute's JROTC Goss Rifles Competition Drill Team **(RIGHT PHOTO)**. *(photo courtesy: Left photo-Jim Cassidy; Right photo: DVS Veterans Service Officer Danielle Thompson)*

Sheep Springs



The ToohHaltTsooi Veterans Organization held a quiet Veterans Day observance outside the small town of Sheep Springs, in southern San Juan County about 65 miles south of Farmington.

To honor of their fellow veterans—especially those that have passed away, members presented colors, displayed artifacts and mementos from their service days, performed a rifle volley salute, and performed a bugle rendition of *Taps*. (photo courtesy: Tommy Sandman/ ToohHaltTsooi Veterans Organization Commander)

Taos Pueblo



Veterans Day in Taos Pueblo began with a traditional procession through the pueblo to the Veterans Memorial. The procession was led by Taos Pueblo Governor Clyde Romero, Sr., Taos Mayor Dan Barrone, State Senator Bobby Gonzales, and other pueblo and town officials. Traditional Honor Songs were then performed by pueblo singers at the ceremony—honoring resident veterans for their service and sacrifice for America. (left photo courtesy: Taos Pueblo tribal member Rick Romancito. Right photo courtesy: Taos community volunteer Ernestina Cordova.)



Chris Teran
DVS Silver City VSO

DVS Fills Silver City VSO Vacancy

DVS is welcoming back Chris Teran as its veterans service officer in Silver City/Grant County.

Teran left the agency in the summer of 2019, and returns to a new DVS Silver City office location on the campus of Western New Mexico University, at 1000 West College Avenue, in the Juan Chacon Building, room 138-A. The native of Bayard served in the U.S. Army from 2001-2008 as a combat medic. His primary focus as a DVS VSO is assisting veterans, their eligible dependents, or unmarried widows of veterans in Grant County with filing VA claims, filing for state veterans benefits, and helping with anything else a veteran or their dependents needs help with.

Appointments must be scheduled in advance by email at christopher.teran@state.nm.us or by calling (575) 313-5627. Safety facemasks must be worn by all visitors to the office. Chris can also offer assistance by email or phone.

Grants & Hobbs VSO vacancies

DVS is in the process of filling VSO vacancies in its Grants and Hobbs offices. Veterans in these communities—or anywhere in New Mexico—can contact any DVS VSO for assistance. A list of DVS VSOs and their contact information can be found on the last two pages of this newsletter.

Upcoming DVS Claims/Benefits Outreaches

The New Mexico Department of Veterans Services (DVS) is hosting Veterans Property Tax Exemption/Benefits Outreaches this month in the following communities and locations:

Gallup (Nov. 19)

McKinley County Assessor's Office (10am-2pm)
207 West Hill Ave.

Santa Rosa (Nov. 19)

Guadalupe County Assessor's Office (10am-2pm)
1448 U.S. Historic Route 66/Suite 2

Las Cruces (Nov. 22)

Doña Ana County Assessor's Office (10am-2pm)
845 N. Motel Blvd.

Albuquerque (Nov. 30)

Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center (main bldg. lobby)
1501 San Pedro Dr. SE



Dagmar Youngberg
DVS Carlsbad VSO

Two DVS VSOs Help Veterans Receive Claims—With Back Pay

DVS Veterans Service Officers (VSOs) Dagmar Youngberg and Danielle Thompson each helped a veteran in their community file claims resulting in the recovery of a substantial amount of back pay from VA.

Ms. Youngberg, based in the DVS Carlsbad office, helped a veteran recover \$738,000 last month. The veteran (*note: DVS will not name the veteran, out of respect for his/her privacy*) made an appointment in March to see Ms. Youngberg—wanting to re-open an old claim...not sure why, after completing military service 20-years ago, he/she has been denied benefits even after three enlistments.

Ms. Youngberg requested and received written permission to reopen the claim and do a “deep dive” into his/her military records.

“I noticed the last of the three enlistments resulted in a less-than-honorable discharge, meaning this veteran could not receive VA benefits,” said Ms. Youngberg. “But I also noticed the veteran’s two previous enlistments ended with honorable discharges. It became clear to me that the original claim was incorrectly processed, and that this veteran should’ve been receiving VA health care benefits all these years—and could probably claim back pay.”

Ms. Youngberg also realized that re-filing a new claim would’ve only resulted in back-pay granted from the new re-filing date. So she contacted Albuquerque VA Regional Officer (VARO) Change Management Agent Cris Sheirer. After he helped order a new round of compensation and pension examinations, the veteran—and Ms. Youngberg—received word late last month: A rating of 100% permanent and total, service-connected disabled—including special monthly compensation. And the news she and the veteran were waiting for: Back pay covering the 20-years since the veteran originally filed a claim within a month after completing the third enlistment.

“I am thrilled beyond words that I was able to help this veteran get what the veteran has deserved all along,” said Ms. Youngberg. “I’d like to thank Cris for his help. The veteran immediately paid off his/her mom’s mortgage—on her birthday, no less. For this veteran, it also now means no more struggling to get by on Social Security Disability Insurance payments (SSDI) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)!”

In Roswell, DVS VSO Danielle Thompson helped a veteran recover \$232,500 as the result of two previously-denied claims for presumptive health conditions related to the veteran’s exposure to Agent Orange during the Vietnam War.

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The passing of the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act by Congress in 2019 allowed a presumption of exposure to Agent Orange to Blue Water Navy Veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam and its offshore waters. These so-called “blue water navy veterans” were now allowed to re-file presumptive exposure claims—with back pay for successful claims.

So VSO Thompson refiled another claim—along with records of the two previously-rejected claims as required by the VA. Once the VA Regional Office received the military records from National Personnel Records Center in November 2020, they were able to request compensation and pension exams

The veteran called Thompson not too long ago--concerned about a large deposit in the veteran’s bank account. So Thompson contacted Mr. Scheirer at the VA Regional Office, who was able to confirm that the third appeal was successful—with back pay.



Danielle Thompson
DVS Roswell VSO

“I was so stunned...and then really excited,” she said. “This has changed the veteran’s life, as you can imagine. The veteran was finally able to retire and do some long dreamed-of travelling with the veteran’s spouse. This just really, really makes me happy.”



DVS Cabinet Secretary Smith Attends Clovis Veterans Town Hall Meeting

DVS Cabinet Secretary Sonya Smith was a featured speaker at a veterans town hall meeting on October 23 in Clovis hosted by American Legion Post 25. *(left photo)*

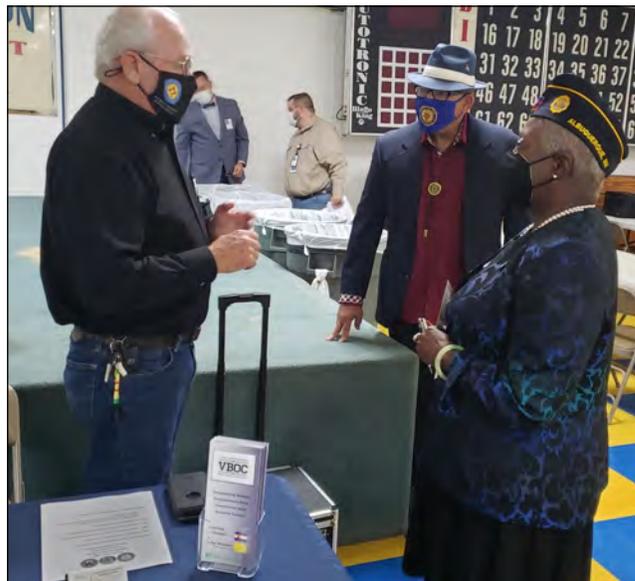
She was invited by the post and American Legion State Commander Robert Rodriguez to give an update on DVS initiatives and plans.

At the top of the list—and despite bringing aboard three new veterans service officers (VSOs) last month, she said, is filling six more VSO vacancies.

“We just hired two VSOs in Las Cruces and one in Albuquerque,” said Secretary Smith. “We are actively working on filling vacancies in Alamogordo, Grants, Hobbs, Raton, Silver City, and Taos. I want to make sure we have coverage for the whole state.” *(NOTE: DVS has since filled the Silver City VSO vacancy. See page 19 for details)*

Secretary Smith said she also wants to work on something she says she’s been hearing about ever since her confirmation nine months ago as DVS cabinet secretary.

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DVS Veterans Business Outreach Center Director Rich Coffel (at left) talks about small business help with American Legion Post 95 member Alexander Cole and American Legion Chaplain Aide Karen Street.

was told that there is a disconnect here in New Mexico, between the north and the south,” said the native of Norfolk, VA. “I’m like...’What?’ This has got to stop. We are all one. We are all veterans. We are all New Mexicans.”

Other topics discussed were the need for veterans to know more about veterans income levels and VA health care thresholds, an increase in the stipend for honor guards, and adding a 2nd honor guard conference.

“This is something I brought up at this summer’s annual honor guard training conference, which was met with a positive reaction,” said Secretary Smith.



DVS Clovis-based Veterans Service Officer Matt Barela (center) answered questions and set up future appointments at his office for veterans needing help with filing VA claims.

There is a critical shortage of doctors and urgent care in Clovis/Curry County, which was brought to the attention of Dr. Dalton Keel, Chief of VA’s Lubbock-Levelland Community Based Outpatient Clinical Services, who was the other guest speaker at the town hall. He also oversees the VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Clovis.

“It’s difficult for small towns like Clovis to attract doctors—this, we are acutely aware of,” said Dr. Keel. “VA is having to incentivize to attract doctors to the Clovis CBOC. But we will keep trying to hire and then keep doctors here.”

Dr. Keel also responded to a point made by a veteran in the audience who pointed out the lack of non-VA urgent care clinics in Clovis—preventing veterans from using VA’s “Choice Act” to receive medical care at VA-approved non-VA facilities.

According to Dr. Keel, Presbyterian Plains Regional Medical Center and its clinics have stopped accepting VA Choice Act patients. DVS Cabinet Secretary Smith, who sits on the Presbyterian Health Care Foundation board of directors, assured Dr. Keel and the veterans in attendance that she will bring this matter up with the foundation.

“Thank you for bringing this to our attention,” she told the audience. “We need to bring Presbyterian back to the table and talk about this.”

DVS Helps Homeless Veterans at “Stand Downs” in Gallup and Farmington

Staff from the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services (DVS) were among the many state, federal, and local agency representatives providing assistance at “stand downs” for homeless veterans in Gallup and Farmington last month.



On October 7, DVS Veterans Service Officers (VSOs) Benjamin Stewart, Durrell Tsosie, and DVS Gallup State Veterans Cemetery Supervisor Gilbert Lopez were at the city of Gallup’s 9th annual “Project Stand Down & Hand Up” stand down at Red Rock Park just outside Gallup. (*top photo*). The trio provided information about VA and state veterans benefits and programs—many of which the attending veterans were not using or were even aware of.

“It’s a lot of misinformation,” said Mr. Stewart. “They’re approaching us, asking us what benefits they’re entitled to, what they qualify for, and how they would go about applying for these benefits.”

On October 8, DVS VSO Beverly Charley spent the day running the floor as the coordinator of the 9th Annual San Juan County Veterans Stand Down at the San Juan College Health & Human Performance Center. (*right & bottom photos*) It’s a role she’s served ever since she helped organize the first stand down along with the San Juan County Veterans Collaborative in 2012.

“This means a lot to me-- we know a lot of the veterans,” said Ms. Charley, who like all DVS VSOs are veterans themselves. “I served in the military for 14-years, and I work with veterans every day. I hear the stories—I hear a lot of the things that they’re going through. I wouldn’t want to be on that side of the road—that side of the desk. They are our brothers and sisters, if you really think about it.”



Both stand downs provided hot meals, free clothing, backpacks, hygiene kits—and even haircuts and dental care at the Farmington event. Many non-homeless and non-veterans showed up. Both have a “don’t ask” policy—no one was or will ever be turned away.

DVS has produced a video showing highlights of both stand downs:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Ynh0ADEGpA>

State Extends COVID Booster Eligibility to All Adults

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham signed an executive order on November 12 expanding eligibility for COVID-19 booster shots to all New Mexico adults as part of the state's strategy to address rising case numbers and hospitalizations, a trend being seen nationwide.



“As we have throughout this unpredictable and unprecedented global pandemic, we always stand ready to quickly implement new tools and policies in our fight against this terrible disease,” said Gov. Lujan Grisham. “I strongly encourage every New Mexican to register for a booster today – we have appointments available and are ready to get shots in arms.”

The Centers for Disease Control's eligibility criteria for boosters include adults 18+ who live or work in a high-risk setting.

New Mexico joins other states – including California and Colorado – that have made boosters available to all adults 18+.

“Case counts are significant, spread rates are far too high, and the Delta variant is far more transmissible than previous variants. In addition, our hospitals are well beyond capacity, and several have declared Crisis Standards of Care,” said Department of Health Acting Secretary David R. Scrase, M.D. “Those factors absolutely make New Mexico a high-risk setting.”

New Mexicans aged 18 and over may now schedule a booster shot if:

- They received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine more than two months ago OR
- They completed the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine series more than six months ago

“Providing boosters for adults will significantly increase levels of immunity protection across our state – and that's essential for all of us. COVID-19 is incredibly opportunistic – and it's our job to ensure that the virus has fewer and fewer opportunities to spread,” said Secretary Scrase. “If it's time for you to get a booster, please do so right away.”

While the vaccines remain highly effective at preventing hospitalizations and deaths, new data suggests that immunity protection can wane over time – leading to more vaccine breakthrough cases. As immunity protection wanes, the immunized become more susceptible to infection – though their infections are typically much milder than those among unvaccinated individuals.

Health officials also strongly recommend that children 5-17 receive vaccinations. New Mexicans can sign up for initial vaccinations and booster shots at [VaccineNM.org](https://vaccinerm.org). Instructions for scheduling children's vaccinations are also available at <https://goodtimes.vaccinerm.org/dependents/>

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MASK REQUIREMENT EXTENDED

The statewide requirement that face masks be worn in all indoor public spaces, with only limited exceptions and regardless of vaccination status, will also be extended, effective through at least December 10.

Staffed hospital beds remain in dangerously short supply, as primarily unvaccinated individuals continue to spread a more infectious variant of the virus, and several New Mexico hospitals have implemented crisis standards of care.

Health officials, including at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, continue to recommend tight-fitting face masks be worn in indoor spaces as they are effective in limiting the spread of the more transmissible Delta variant.

The governor, acting upon the counsel and analysis of the state Medical Advisory Team and state health officials, may decide to extend or lift the mask requirement as necessary. A separate public health order requiring health care workers to be vaccinated and implementing vaccinate-or-test protocols for school workers remains in place. The Department of Health also advises all New Mexicans aged 6 months and older to get a flu shot. Many providers of the COVID-19 vaccine also provide a flu shot. *FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT [VACCINENM.ORG](https://vaccinenm.org) or [CV.NMHEALTH.ORG](https://cv.nmhealth.org).*

DVS, New Mexico VA Health Care System Urge Veterans to Sign Up for COVID Booster Shots

DVS Cabinet Secretary Sonya Smith urges New Mexico's veterans and their eligible adult dependents to sign up for COVID booster shots—either through the state or the New Mexico VA Health Care System (NMVAHCS).

“As with the initial COVID vaccine, veterans have two excellent options to get the booster shot,” said Secretary Smith. “Please—let’s not let our guard down against this virus. Let’s do our part to keep New Mexico safe.”

The NMVAHCS operates a drive-through “Camp Murphy” vaccination clinic at the Albuquerque Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center, located at 1501 San Pedro Drive SE.

“Boosters are an important step forward in the fight against this pandemic,” said Jean NMVAHCS Interim Medical Center Director Jean Gurga. “Our ultimate goal is to have all veterans vaccinated who want to be vaccinated.”

As with the state option, registration is required for NMVAHCS booster shots. Please call (505) 265-1711 for more information or to register.



News from the VA



VA Extends Presumptive Period For Gulf War Veterans

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has extended the presumptive period to Dec. 31, 2026 for qualifying chronic disabilities rated 10% or more resulting from undiagnosed illnesses in Persian Gulf War veterans to ensure benefits established by Congress are fairly administered.

If an extension of the current presumptive period was not implemented, service members whose conditions arise after Dec. 31, 2021 would be substantially disadvantaged compared to service members whose conditions manifested at an earlier date.

Limiting entitlement to benefits due to the expiration of the presumptive period would be premature given that current studies remain inconclusive as to the cause and time of onset of illnesses suffered by Persian Gulf War veterans.

VA presumes certain medically unexplained illnesses are related to Persian Gulf War service without regard to cause, including, chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, and functional gastrointestinal disorders. Also included are undiagnosed illnesses with symptoms that may include but are not limited to abnormal weight loss, cardiovascular disease, muscle and joint pain, headache, menstrual disorders, neurological and psychological problems, skin conditions, respiratory disorders and sleep disturbances.

Persian Gulf War Veterans who are experiencing any of the symptoms listed above and other unexplained medical issues are encouraged to file a claim. *(NOTE; Contact any DVS veterans service officer (VSO) listed on the back pages of this newsletter)*

For more information about this development for Gulf War veterans:

<https://www.benefits.va.gov/persona/veteran-gulfwar.asp>

VA Accesses Resources to Increase Housing Assistance to Vulnerable Veterans

VA has updated regulations governing the Supportive Services for Veteran Families grant program to provide a more effective subsidy to veterans in high-cost rental markets and to increase the cap in general housing assistance available to the most vulnerable veteran families.



Under the new regulations, in certain communities, the SSVF grant will cover up to 50%, an increase from 35%, of eligible veterans' reasonable rent for two years without need for recertification.

“We know veterans are increasingly vulnerable to homelessness and housing insecurity,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “The updated regulations give Supportive Services for Veteran Families grantees more flexibility and tools to keep veterans housed while also helping them increase their income and access permanent affordable housing solutions.”



The new rule also expands the maximum stay in emergency housing for unsheltered veterans.

The original rule authorized placement for a veteran and his or her spouse with dependents in emergency housing for up to 45 days, which proved often not enough time to locate stable and affordable permanent housing in highly competitive rental markets.

A veteran and his or her spouse with dependents can now stay in emergency housing for a maximum

of 60 days. The 15-day increase in length-of-stay is expected to have the most significant benefit to veteran families in rental markets with few vacancies, as well as unsheltered homeless veterans families.

Ending veteran homelessness is a top priority for VA, aligned with the White House's priority to promote housing stability by supporting vulnerable tenants.



From the Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center in Albuquerque

2021 Adopt a Star Event



The Health Care for Homeless Veterans Team is excited to host the Sixth - Adopt a Star Event

No child ever chose to live in poverty. These are the "innocents."

Adopt a Star attempts to bring some sunshine into their lives during the holiday season - a time when every other "good little boy or girl" they know is receiving gifts. Adopt a Star provides much needed clothing items, special needs gifts and other wished-for toys for Albuquerque's Health Care for Homeless Veterans children. These gifts in truth give low-income children "food for the soul"-the hope of a brighter future and the reassurance that someone does indeed care about them.

Adopt a Star Eligibility Requirements:

-children ages 0-18

-must be a child in the Health Care for Homeless Veterans Programs within the New Mexico VA Health Care System

-children must be registered through their Case Manager at the New Mexico VA Health Care System

Important Note:

Income eligibility guidelines will be used in determining the income eligibility of persons applying to participate in our Adopt a Star Event.



HOW TO PARTICIPATE

We welcome all VA Services and Veteran Service Organizations to Adopt A Star.

Where: 1501 San Pedro SE Albuquerque, NM 87108, Modular Building 96

When: Friday, December 3rd, 2021

Time: 10:00 am – 3:00 pm *Come to Building 96, select an ornament(s) from the tree, and have fun!

We are requesting that donations be dropped off no later than **COB Monday, December 13, 2021** to an Adopt a Star Committee Member located in the HCHV Modular Building 96.

Additional Instructions will be provided at the Adopt a Star Event. Please contact Adrianna Miller at adrianna.miller@va.gov or Renee Adam at renee.adam@va.gov for any questions



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 below and 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 threat, 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 cemetery division (for the Angel Fire, Ft. Stanton, and Gallup State Veterans Cemeteries)
- 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

Temporarily vacant. For assistance, contact the DVS Las Cruces or Roswell offices, or call (505) 83-2400

Albuquerque VSO (Downtown)

George Vargas
500 Gold Ave. SW
(575) 520-2634
george.vargas@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 (NE Heights)

Jesus Palomino
5201 Eagle Rock Blvd. NE
(505) 681-6998
jesus.palomino1@state.nm.us

Carlsbad VSO

Dagmar Youngberg
101 N. Halagueno
(575) 988-5900
dagmar.youngberg@state.nm.us

(continued on next page)

Clovis VSO**Matt Barela**904 W. Sixth St.
(575) 825-9602matthew.barea@state.nm.us**Farmington VSO****Beverly Charley**San Juan College Veteran Center
(505) 327-2861beverly.charley@state.nm.us**Gallup VSO****Durrell Tsoie**908 E. Buena Vista Ave./Room 1A
(505) 218-0348durrell.tsoie@state.nm.us**Gallup VSO****Benjamin Stewart**908 E. Buena Vista Ave./Room 1A
(575) 386-7911benjamin.stewart@state.nm.us**Grants VSO***Temporarily vacant. For assistance,
contact the DVS Gallup office,
or call (505) 383-2400***Hobbs VSO***Temporarily vacant. For assistance,
contact the DVS Carlsbad or Roswell
or call (505) 383-2400***Las Cruces VSO****Miguel Martinez**2024 E. Griggs Ave.
(575) 644-6869miguel.martinez1@state.nm.us**Las Cruces VSO****Vincent Tellez**2024 E. Griggs Ave.
(505) 361-5298vincent.tellez@state.nm.us**Las Cruces VSO***Las Cruces VSO Rosa Bycenski currently
on leave of absence.***Las Vegas, NM VSO****Martín Márquez**917 Douglas Ave.
(575) 520-5079martinM.marquez@state.nm.us**Las Vegas, NM VSO****Arturo Marlow**917 Douglas Ave.
(505) 331-8838arturo.marlow@state.nm.us**Rio Rancho VSO****Dustin Newsom**1500 Idalia Rd./Bldg. D, Room 2041
(505) 221-7190dustin.newsom@state.nm.us**Roswell VSO****Danielle Thompson**1600 SE Main St./Suite "A"
(575) 416-2284danielle.thompson@state.nm.us**Santa Fe VSO****Nick McKenzie**Bataan Memorial Bldg/1st floor
407 Galisteo St./Room 134
(505) 218-3125nicholas.McKenzie1@state.nm.us**Silver City VSO****Chris Teran**Western NM University
Juan Chacon Bldg./Room 138-A
1000 West College Ave.
(575) 313-5627christopher.teran@state.nm.us**Women Veterans
Program/VSO****Robin Wilson (Program Mgr.)**5201 Eagle Rock Blvd. NE
(Albuquerque)
(505) 372-9106robin.wilson@state.nm.us**Veterans Business
Outreach Center (VBOC)****Rich Coffel (Director)**5201 Eagle Rock Blvd. NE
(Albuquerque)
(505) 220-9932richardL.coffel@state.nm.us**Angel Fire****State Veterans Cemetery****Randy Myklebust (Supervisor)**

34 Country Club Rd.

(505) 225-4341

randal.myklebust@state.nm.us**Gallup****State Veterans Cemetery****Gilbert Lopez (Supervisor)**333 National Cemetery Dr.
(505) 905-9771gilbert.lopez@state.nm.us**Ft. Stanton****State Veterans Cemetery****Stephen McConnell (Supervisor)**1398 State Highway 220
(505) 383-4381stephen.mcconnell@state.nm.us