

The New Mexico Dept. of Veterans Services



2022 ANNUAL REPORT

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Message From New Mexico Department of Veterans Services Cabinet Secretary Sonya L. Smith

“Get vaccinated...mask up...and continue the mission.”

This was the 2021 New Mexico Department of Veterans Services (DVS) battle cry, as our nation continued to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic that first impacted our country in the spring of 2020. Though there was a brief respite last spring from wearing safety masks at outdoor public gatherings, a surge of the *Omicron* variant of the virus in the fall of 2021 brought back a health department directive to wear a mask once again while in group gatherings.

Throughout this public health crisis, DVS continued its mission of serving New Mexico’s veterans and their families. At the beginning of last year, all statewide DVS offices remained closed for in-person service—a continuation of a public health order issued a year earlier. DVS veterans service officers (VSOs) quickly and seamlessly switched to providing benefits assistance by email and phone from the safety of their homes—and maintained their excellent level of service that veterans have come to expect from DVS VSOs.



Sonya L. Smith
DVS Cabinet Secretary

Words cannot adequately convey just how proud I am of DVS staff for continuing to assist New Mexico’s veteran community through this ongoing COVID pandemic. I am in awe of the way the staff has remained steadfast in its commitment to not letting the pandemic get in the way of them helping veterans with their VA and state veterans benefits—benefits which can make a tremendous difference in the quality of life for a veteran. Our staff has also helped veterans deal with financial difficulties and other critical issues caused by the pandemic.

DVS, as with all state agencies, reopened for in-person office visits last summer on an appointment-only basis. So, veterans can once again get in-person help from their local VSO. Our VSOs are wearing safety masks, and their offices are wiped down with disinfectant products between each appointment. And our VSOs continuously wash their hands throughout the day.

But one thing DVS has learned during this pandemic is this: DVS VSOs can actually help any veteran in New Mexico. Any veteran...can contact any VSO in the state...to get phone or email assistance. It’s that simple...and equally effective as an in-person visit! All public events have been postponed for the first part of 2022—again, in response to the *Omicron* virus variant that has spread throughout the country. DVS will reschedule postponed events when possible and will continue to abide by the state health department regarding policies and procedures for hosting public ceremonies, conferences, and outreach events for the remainder of 2022. In the meantime, I ask that you please be patient with us and with all state agencies. We want to continue, as our motto states, “serving those who served”. I am confident that our nation will soon get ahead of this virus—and we can all once again meet each other in public when the time is right.

Sonya L. Smith
Cabinet Secretary
The New Mexico Department of Veterans Services

THE NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS SERVICES (DVS)

DVS Mission

To provide the highest quality service and advocacy for New Mexico's veterans and their families.

DVS Vision

To be recognized as a premier agency that anticipates and meets the changing needs of New Mexico's veterans and their families by investing for tomorrow—and delivering today.

DVS Core Values (C.A.R.E.S)

Commitment

DVS is committed to the agency's mandate—the sole reason of the agency's existence—of serving our state's veterans and their families.

Accountability

DVS will hold the agency's employees to the highest standards expected of a premier professional service organization.

Respect

DVS will treat every veteran, regardless of their rank while they were in military service, with the respect and gratitude they have earned for sacrificing to serve and protect our country.

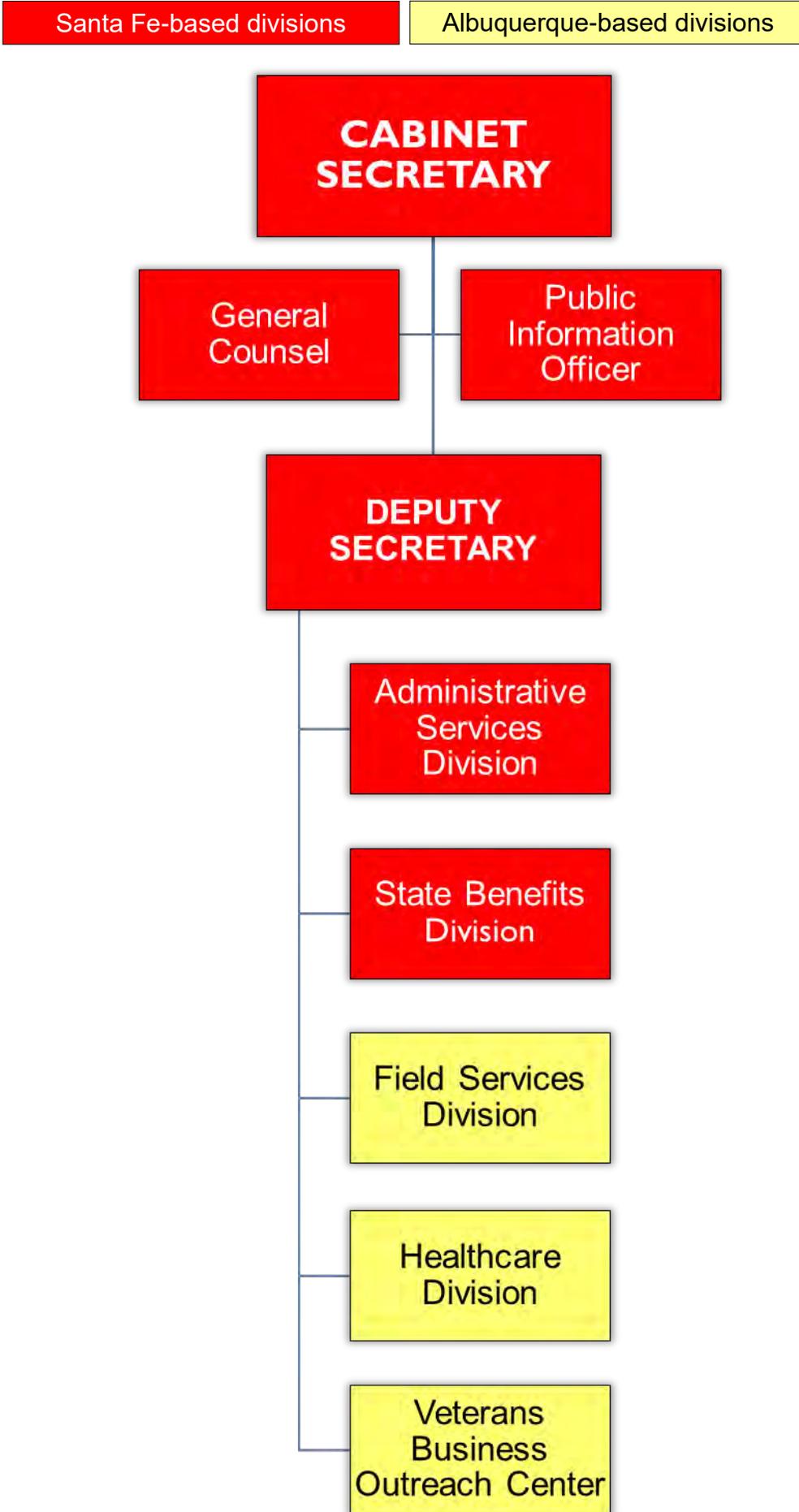
Empathy

DVS staff are all veterans, are closely related to a veteran, or strongly support those who have served in the military—and therefore understand and have a strong compassion for all veterans and their families.

Stewardship

DVS staff will ensure responsible stewardship of the human, financial, and informational programs and resources entrusted to us. We will improve performance through the use of innovative technologies, evidence-based practices, and sound business principles.

DVS Organizational Chart



Directory of DVS Main Offices

OFFICE OF THE CABINET SECRETARY

406 Don Gaspar Ave.

Santa Fe, NM 87501

CABINET SECRETARY

Executive Assistant

General Counsel

Public Information Officer

Sonya L. Smith

Shannon Quintana

Gabrielle Sanchez-Sandoval

Ray Seva

(505) 827-6334

(505) 362-6089

SANTA FE MAIN ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

Bataan Memorial Bldg.

407 Galisteo St.

Santa Fe, NM 87501

DEPUTY SECRETARY

(temporarily vacant)

Administrative Services Division

Budget Bureau

State Approving Agency

Information & Technology Services

Director-(temporarily vacant)

Danelle Lucero—*Chief Financial Officer*

Katherine Snyder —*Agency Director*

Terrence Rickard—*Chief Information Officer*

State Benefits Division

Administrative Support

State Benefits Program

Cemeteries & Memorials Program

Ed Mendez—Director

Silvia Varela—*Administrative Assistant*

Jeff George—*Program Manager*

David Walker—*Program Manager*

(505) 827-6300

State Veterans Cemeteries

Angel Fire

Ft. Stanton

Gallup

Randal Myklebust—*Supervisor*

Stephen McConnell—*Supervisor*

Gilbert Lopez—*Supervisor*

(505) 225-4341

(505) 383-4381

(505) 905-9771

Vietnam Veterans Memorial

DB Herbst—*Manager*

(575) 377-2293

ALBUQUERQUE NE HEIGHTS OFFICE

5201 Eagle Rock Ave. NE
Albuquerque, NM 87113

Receptionist

(505) 383-2400

Field Services Division

15 Field Offices/20 VSOs

George Vargas—Director

(see pages 8 & 9 for contact information)

Health Care Division

Women Veterans Program

Diane Mourning Brown—Director

Robin Wilson—*Program Manager*

318-6273

372-9106

Veterans Business Outreach Center Rich Coffel—Director

220-9932

DOWNTOWN ALBUQUERQUE OFFICE

Dennis Chavez Federal Bldg./4th Floor
500 Gold Ave. SW
Albuquerque, NM 87102

Administrative Assistant
to Field Services Director

Jovanna Dutchover

346-4873

DVS Cabinet Secretary Sonya L. Smith



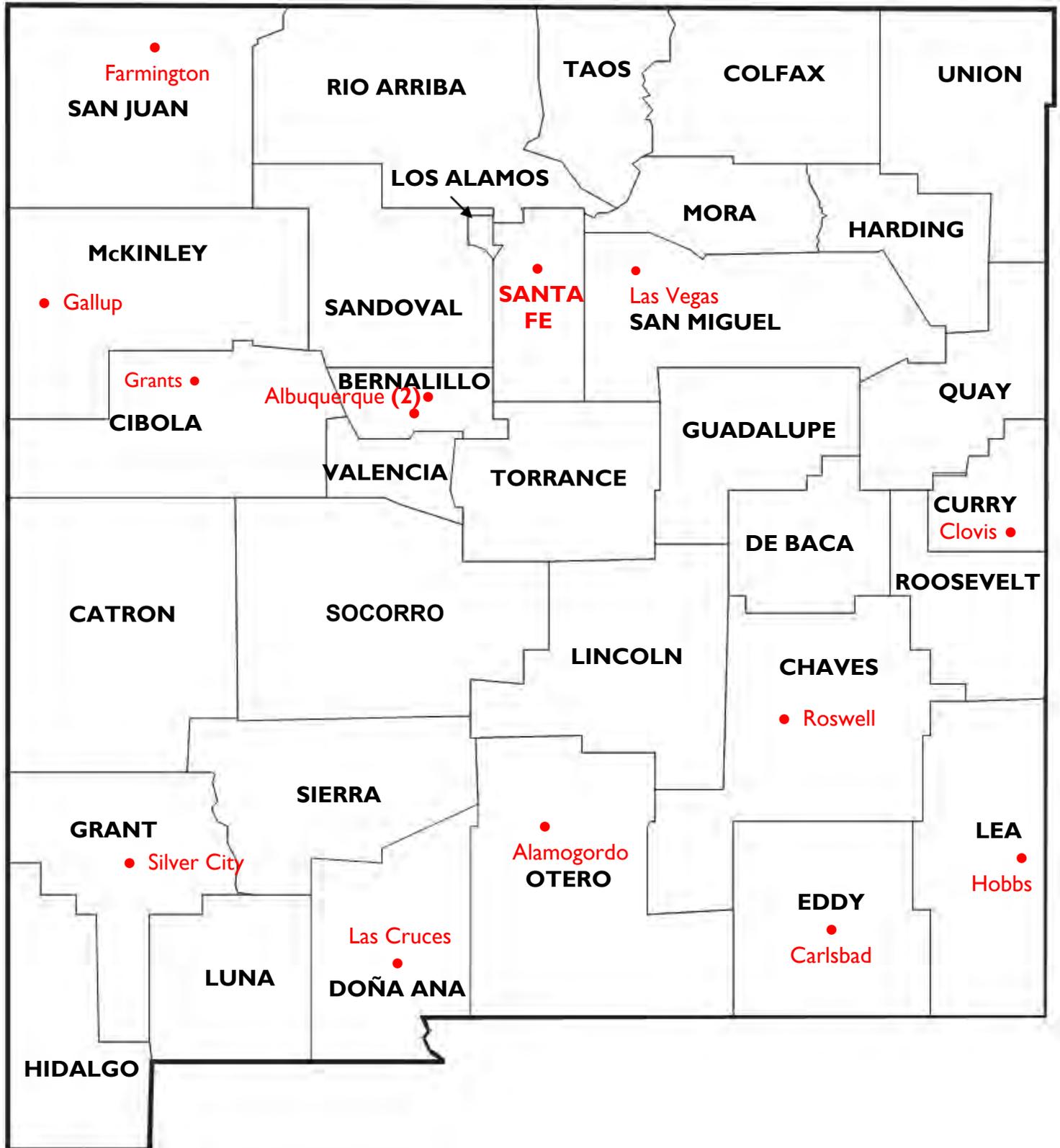
Sonya L. Smith was appointed as cabinet secretary of the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services (DVS) by Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham on October 23, 2020. She was unanimously confirmed for the post by the state senate on February 17 during the 2021 New Mexico Legislature.

Secretary Smith comes to DVS from the New Mexico Department of Health as a special projects coordinator--specifically helping guide the efforts of the agency's COVID-19 testing team. Prior to that, she served as director of compliance at Southwest Care Center in Santa Fe, and before that, as the clinical compliance manager at the University of New Mexico Truman Health Services Clinic.

As a member of the United States Air Force Reserve, Secretary Smith was activated to serve as a medical technician in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Upon receiving her honorable discharge, she earned a Bachelor's Degree in Health Services Management from Norfolk State University in her hometown of Norfolk, VA, and a Master's Degree in Health Care Compliance from Argosy University.

FIELD SERVICES DIVISION

The heart and soul of DVS are the agency's 21 nationally-certified veterans service officers (VSOs) working in the agency's 14 field offices throughout the state as shown below. These VSOs are the "boots on the ground" staff that work with veterans or their eligible dependents with filing VA claims, filing for state veterans benefits, or assisting with any other issues.



DVS Field Offices & Veterans Service Officers (VSOs)

- All visits to DVS offices require an appointment.. Please contact a veterans service officer (VSO) below to make an appointment.
- Counties served by the VSO are in red. **Boldface indicates the “home” county.** Subsequent counties are frequent outreach destinations by the VSO.
- VSOs can also provide assistance by phone or email. Any veteran or their eligible dependents from anywhere In the state can contact any VSO for assistance.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, safety face masks must be worn for all office and outreach visits.

Alamogordo

VSO: David Henley

411 10th Street #107

(575) 937-5620

david.henley1@state.nm.us

Counties served: **Otero**, Lincoln,

Albuquerque (Downtown)

George Vargas

500 Gold Ave. SW

(575) 520-2634

george.vargas@state.nm.us

Counties served: **Bernalillo**,
Sandoval, Socorro, Torrance, Valencia

Albuquerque (Downtown)

Temporarily vacant. For in-person assistance, please contact DVS VSO George Vargas for assistance (info at left), or call (505) 383-2400.

Albuquerque (NE Heights)

Johnny Martinez

5201 Eagle Rock Blvd. NE

(505) 274-3609

johnW.martinez2@state.nm.us

Counties served: **Bernalillo**,
Sandoval, Socorro, Torrance, Valencia

Albuquerque (NE Heights)

Jesus Palomino

5201 Eagle Rock Blvd. NE

(505) 681-6998

jesus.palomino1@state.nm.us

Counties served: **Bernalillo**, Sandoval,
Socorro, Torrance, Valencia

Carlsbad

Dagmar Youngberg

101 N. Halagueno

(575) 988-5900

dagmar.youngberg@state.nm.us

Counties served: **Eddy**, Chaves, Lea

Clovis

Matt Barela

904 W. Sixth St.

(575) 825-9602

matthew.barea@state.nm.us

Counties served: **Curry**, DeBaca,
Quay, Roosevelt

Farmington

Please contact the DVS Gallup office for email or phone assistance...or to make an appointment for in-person assistance at regularly-scheduled outreach visits.

Gallup

Durrell Tsoie

908 E. Buena Vista Ave./Room 1A

(505) 218-0348

durrell.tsoie@state.nm.us

Counties served: **McKinley**,
Catron, Cibola

Gallup

Benjamin Stewart

908 E. Buena Vista Ave./Room 1A

(575) 386-7911

benjamin.stewart@state.nm.us

Counties served: **McKinley**,
Catron, Cibola

Grants

Temporarily vacant. For assistance, contact the DVS Gallup office, or call (505) 383-2400

Counties served: **Cibola**, Catron,
McKinley

Hobbs

Temporarily vacant. For assistance, contact the DVS Carlsbad or Roswell or call (505) 383-2400

Counties served: **Lea**, Chaves,
Eddy

(continued on next page)

Las Cruces**Rosa Bycenski**

2024 E. Griggs Ave.

(505) 216-8782

rosa.bycenski@state.nm.usCounties served: **Doña Ana,**
Grant, Sierra**Las Cruces****Miguel Martinez**

2024 E. Griggs Ave.

(505) 216-8782

miguel.martinez1@state.nm.usCounties served: **Doña Ana,**
Grant, Sierra**Las Cruces****Vincent Tellez**

2024 E. Griggs Ave.

(505) 216-8782

vincent.tellez@state.nm.usCounties served: **Doña Ana,**
Grant, Sierra**Las Vegas, NM****Martín Márquez**

917 Douglas Ave.

(575) 520-5079

martinM.marquez@state.nm.usCounties served: **San Miguel,** Catron, Colfax,
Guadalupe, Harding, Mora, Union**Las Vegas, NM****Arturo Marlow**

917 Douglas Ave.

(505) 331-8838

arturo.marlow@state.nm.usCounties served: **San Miguel,** Catron, Colfax,
Guadalupe, Harding, Mora, Union**Rio Rancho****Dustin Newsom**

1500 Idalia Rd./Bldg. D, Room 2041

(505) 221-7190

dustin.newsom@state.nm.usCounties served: **Sandoval,**
Los Alamos**Roswell****Danielle Thompson**

1600 SE Main St./Suite "A"

(575) 416-2284

danielle.thompson@state.nm.usCounties served: **Chaves,** Lincoln**Santa Fe****Nick McKenzie**

Bataan Memorial Bldg/1st floor

407 Galisteo St./Room 134

(505) 218-3125

nicholas.mckenzie1@state.nm.usCounties served: **Santa Fe,**
Los Alamos, Rio Arriba, Taos**Silver City****Chris Teran**

Western New Mexico University

Juan Chacon Bldg./Room 138-A

1000 West College Ave.

(575) 313-5627

christopher.teran@state.nm.usCounties served: **Grant,** Hidalgo,
Luna**Women Veterans
Program/VSO****Robin Wilson (Program Mgr.)**

5201 Eagle Rock Blvd. NE

(Albuquerque)

(505) 372-9106

robin.wilson@state.nm.us**DVS Native American Liaison****Beverly Charley**

San Juan College Veterans Center 4601

College Blvd./Room 1715-B

(505) 327-2861

beverly.charley@state.nm.us**Veterans Business
Outreach Center (VBOC)****Rich Coffel (Director)**

5201 Eagle Rock Blvd. NE (Albuquerque)

(505) 220-9932

richardL.coffel@state.nm.us**Angel Fire
State Veterans Cemetery****Randy Myklebust (Supervisor)**

34 Country Club Rd.

(505) 225-4341

randal.myklebust@state.nm.us**Ft. Stanton State Veterans
Cemetery****Stephen McConnell (Supervisor)**

1398 State Highway 220

(505) 383-4381

randal.myklebust@state.nm.us**Gallup
State Veterans Cemetery****Gilbert Lopez (Supervisor)**

333 National Cemetery Dr.

(505) 905-9771

gilbert.lopez@state.nm.us

Success Stories: Two DVS VSOs Help Veterans Recoup Previously Denied VA Benefits—Plus Interest—Resulting in Large Payouts



Dagmar Youngberg
DVS Carlsbad VSO

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.

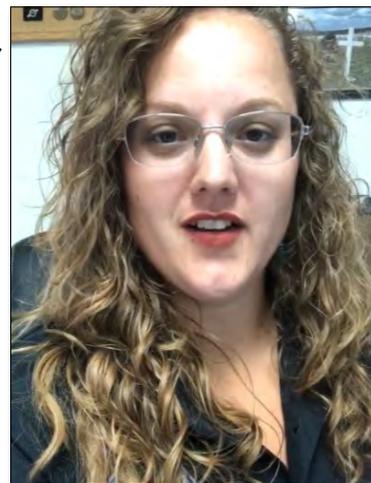
“I noticed the last of the three enlistments resulted in a less-than-honorable discharge, meaning this veteran could not receive VA benefits,” said Ms. Youngberg. “But I also noticed the veteran’s two previous enlistments ended with honorable discharges. It became clear to me that the original claim 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 earlier this year as the result of a previously denied claim for presumptive health conditions related to the veteran’s exposure to Agent Orange during the Vietnam War.

The passing of the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act by Congress in 2019 allowed a presumption of exposure to Agent Orange for “Blue Water Navy veterans”—those who served within 12 nautical miles offshore of the Republic of Vietnam.



Danielle Thompson
DVS Roswell VSO

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These Blue Water Navy veterans were now allowed to file presumptive exposure claims , or appeal previously denied claims. “Back pay” would also be awarded for successful re-filed claims. So Mrs. Thompson refiled another claim—also sending records from the previously rejected claim as required by VA. Once the VA Regional Office received the military records from the National Personal Records in November 2020, they were able to request Compensation and Pension Exams.

The veteran called Mrs. Thompson back last fall--concerned about a large deposit in the veteran’s bank account. So she contacted Mr. Scheirer at the VA Regional Office, who confirmed the appeal was successful—resulting in an award with back pay going back 20 years.

“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. It is such a great feeling knowing that we helped make a difference in someone’s life. ”

FIELD SERVICES DIVISION

End-of-Fiscal-Year 2021 Report (Jul. 1, 2020-Jun. 30, 2021)

NUMBER OF OFFICE VISITS **0***

**All state agency in-office visits were halted due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
DVS VSOs provided remote assistance by phone and email*

PHONE & E-MAIL ASSISTANCE **29,411**

TOTAL OF ALL VA CLAIMS: \$909,534,816

New POA assignments 713
DVS 690

Non POA Claims 158

Federal Benefits

Intent to File	615
Service-Connected Claims	1,194
Non-Service Connected Pension Claims	36
Health Care	30
Dependency & Indemnity Compensation	103
Total	1,978

State Veterans Benefits

Tax Exemption	1,285
100% Service-connected disabled waivers	419
License Plates	534
Parks Passes	197
Hunting & Fishing Licenses	111
Education	0
Scholarships	14
Total	2,558

STATE BENEFITS DIVISION

The DVS State Benefits Division encompasses the state benefits bureau and the cemetery & memorial operations bureau. It oversees the many state veterans benefits that are described below that are available for honorably-discharged veterans living in New Mexico.

The cemetery & memorial operations bureau oversees the DVS State Cemetery Program and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire. More information about the program and memorial can be found on page 17.

The state benefits division director continuously works to identify additional benefits—bringing these to the attention of the cabinet secretary for possible introduction to state legislators for consideration as state law. The director also coordinates with the DVS Field Services Division for outreach throughout the state to increase awareness about these available benefits and programs.

State Benefits Division 2021 End-of-Year Report

(January 1— December 31, 2021)

Property Tax Exemptions	3,099 processed applications
Disabled Veteran Property Tax Waivers	1,112
License Plate Applications	687
State Parks & Museum Passes	516
Lifetime Hunting & Fishing Licenses	432
Wartime Scholarships	65
TOTAL	5,911

State Veterans Benefits



Veterans Tax Exemptions

Veterans Property Tax Exemption

Any veteran who served a minimum of 90 days consecutive active duty, was honorably discharged, and is a legal resident of New Mexico qualifies for a \$4,000 reduction in the taxable value of their real property for county taxation purposes. If not applied towards a property, the veteran may receive

a 1/3 discount off of their vehicle registrations. This benefit is also available to non-remarried surviving spouses of a veteran who would have otherwise qualified for this benefit.

Disabled Veteran Property Tax Exemption

Any veteran who has been rated 100% service-connected disabled (permanent & total) by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and is a legal resident of New Mexico qualifies for a complete property tax waiver on their primary residence. This benefit is also available to non-remarried surviving spouses of a veteran who would have otherwise qualified for this benefit.

Exemption from Excise Taxes on Vehicle Purchases

Any veteran who has suffered the loss or complete loss of use of one or more limbs due to their military service shall be exempted from excise taxes when purchasing a new vehicle.

Veterans Service Organization Property Tax Exemption

Any U.S. Congressionally-chartered Veterans service organization is exempt from paying property tax on the property of its facility. Many VSO's—especially those in rural areas of the state—have been devoting much of their fundraising revenue to paying property tax.



Veterans Education Benefits

Vietnam Veteran Scholarship

Veterans who have been residents of New Mexico for a minimum of ten years, have served in the Vietnam War, and were issued the Vietnam Campaign or Service Medal are eligible. This scholarship pays full tuition and provides a stipend for all books at any state-funded post-secondary school.

Wartime Veteran Scholarship Fund

Can be used by any veteran who has served in combat since August 1, 1990, and who has exhausted all available federal G.I. Education Benefits options. Veterans must be residents of New Mexico for at least ten years and have also been awarded a campaign medal. Tuition and fees for books are also capped on an annual basis.

In-State Tuition for Veterans

Veterans, their spouses and their children no longer have to wait to establish “in-state” residency status when applying for college. Those who wish to use their G.I. Education Benefit Bill can now immediately take advantage of less-expensive “resident” in-state tuition rates at any state funded college, university, vocational school or vocational training program.

World War II, Korean, and Vietnam War Veterans High School Diploma

Any veteran who left a New Mexico high school before graduating to serve in World War II, the Korean War, or Vietnam War will be awarded a valid high school diploma issued from the high school they were attending.

Children of Deceased Veterans Scholarship

A child between the ages of 16-26 whose parent was killed in action or died as a result of their combat wounds, was a member of the New Mexico National Guard and passed away while on activation by the Governor, or was a New Mexico State Police Officer who was killed in the line of duty, qualifies for a full tuition waiver at any state-funded post-secondary school. A \$150 stipend per semester will also be issued to help pay for books or fees.

Military Children School Enrollment Priority

Priority enrollment status is automatically assigned to incoming students or the New Mexico schools system whose active-duty, National Guard or Reservist parent is transferred to a New Mexico military facility.

VETERANS RECOGNITION BENEFITS

National Guard and Reserve Defined as Veterans

In New Mexico, veteran status is given to anyone honorably discharged after serving six consecutive years as a member of any national guard or reserve component unit. Veteran status is also given to any commissioned officers of the Public Health Service or the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration who served on active duty in service of the United States.

Veterans License Plates

Honorably discharged veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces are eligible for special veterans license plates—provided they show proof of eligibility. The two plates below are available for a one-time vehicle registration fee. Recipients are responsible for any annual vehicle license fees.



Armed Forces Veteran (any branch)



Woman Veteran (any branch)



Medal of Honor Recipient



Purple Heart Recipient



Ex-Prisoner of War

The three special-recognition plates shown above are available free of charge for any qualified veteran who can provide proof of eligibility:



Disabled Veteran License Plate

Honorably-discharged veterans rated at least 50 percent service-disabled are entitled to two free license plates.

Gold Star Family License Plate

For families with a son, daughter, stepson, stepdaughter, parent or step-parent killed in combat action. There is a four-plate limit per family. The first plate is free, and fees will be waived for the lifetime of the recipient. The remaining three plates are also free, but recipients are responsible for annual registration fees.



Patriot License Plate

The *Patriot License Plate* can be purchased by any licensed New Mexico driver who wants to recognize the contribution and sacrifice of the men and women who are serving or have served in the U.S. Armed Forces. The one-time fee is \$27. (Regular vehicle registration fees still apply.)



Special MacArthur Service Medal

The Special MacArthur Service Medal is issued members of the 200th/515th Coast Artillery Units who were residents of New Mexico at their original time of entry into the U.S. Military and served under General Douglas MacArthur in the Philippine Islands during World War II. The medal is also available to surviving family members of the 200th/515th units

Other State Veterans Benefits

Service Member Child Custody Protection

Child custody arrangements cannot be modified while a parent is deployed for military service. All child custody issues involving a deployed parent must wait to be resolved until the deployed parent returns to New Mexico.



New Mexico Personnel Office Veterans Hiring Preference

All veterans honorably discharged from the U.S. Armed Forces or anyone currently serving in the National Guard shall have five (5) points added to their final passing numerical scores on screening examinations performed by the NM State Personnel Office. Veterans honorably discharged with a service connected disability will have ten (10) points added to their final passing numerical score.

5% Procurement Advantage for Veteran-Owned Businesses or Contractors

The state of New Mexico shall set aside an additional 5% hiring preference for veteran-owned businesses or contractors over the existing 5% preference currently established for locally-owned businesses during the bidding process for state contracts and jobs.



Military Discharge Papers Protection

Military discharge papers filed with county clerks in the state of New Mexico shall only be made available to the veteran who filed them, the veteran's next-of-kin, or a person designated by a court of law as the veteran's general power-of-attorney.

Deceased Military Person's Disposition Arrangements

A person designated as the immediate contact on the Department of Defense (DoD) Emergency Data Form of an active-duty member of the U.S. Armed Forces can determine the means of disposition of that deceased Armed Forces member. The designee is authorized to make burial, funeral and disposition arrangements.

Veterans Free and Reduced-Fee Recreational Benefits

Veterans Day Recreation and Museum Privileges

Every Veterans Day holiday, any New Mexico resident who was honorably discharged from the U.S. Armed Forces or is currently on active-duty—along with their spouse and children—is entitled to free use of any New Mexico state park. Admission fees will be also be waived for campsites, the Museum of New Mexico, the New Mexico Museum of Natural History, and the New Mexico Museum of Space History.

State Parks Day-Pass and Three Free Camping Nights for Disabled Veterans

Any veteran rated 50% or higher service-connected disabled may obtain an annual free day-use pass and three free nights of camping for personal use only. Qualified veterans may apply for these passes by showing proper identification and proof of disability at any DVS field office.

Free State Parks Monuments and Museums Pass for Disabled Veterans

Any veteran rated 50% or higher service-connected disabled may apply for a free state monument and museum pass for personal use only. Qualified veterans can apply for this pass by showing proper identification and proof of disability at any DVS field office.



Lifetime Hunting and Fishing License for 100% Service-Connected Disabled Veterans

Any veteran who is a New Mexico resident and is rated 100% service-connected disabled is eligible for a free lifetime New Mexico small-game hunting and fishing license.

Reduced-Fee Hunting and Fishing License for Disabled Veterans

New Mexico's 26,000 service-connected disabled veterans may apply for a reduced fee \$10 small-game & fishing license--no matter *what percentage their disability*.

Hunting Fee Discount for Non-Resident Disabled Veterans Undergoing Rehabilitation

Hunting licenses for deer, antelope, elk, javelina and turkey may be sold to non-resident disabled U.S. Armed Forces members or veterans at resident license-fee rates if the applicant is undergoing a rehabilitation program utilizing hunting activities supported by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) or an authorized nonprofit organization.

Temporary Hunting and Fishing License for Active-Duty Military Personnel

Any active duty military personnel, National Guard or Reserve member who is a legally domiciled resident of New Mexico can apply for a temporary active duty fishing or small game hunting license. Applicants must show proof of residency and not claim residency elsewhere. Applicants may also apply if they are on active duty outside the state but are currently on leave here in New Mexico for not more than 30 days.

DVS State Cemetery & Memorial Operations Bureau

All honorably discharged deceased veterans of the United States Armed Forces are entitled to a military burial with military honors provided by an Honor Guard. According to the latest VA data, nearly half of New Mexico's 156,595 veterans live beyond the VA's designated 75-mile service-area radius of its two national cemeteries: The Santa Fe National Cemetery in northern New Mexico, and the Ft. Bayard National Cemetery in the southwestern part of the state. DVS created the State Cemetery & Memorial Operations Bureau in 2013 to build four rural-area cemeteries. DVS successfully applied for funding from the VA's Cemetery Grant Program, which funds VA-funded-but state-managed veterans cemeteries.



Ft. Stanton State Veterans Cemetery

New Mexico's first state veterans cemetery was built in Ft. Stanton in Lincoln County (*left photo*). The 14.8-acre, \$5.7 million cemetery opened on Veterans Day, 2017, featuring 510 in-ground crypts, and 140 columbarium and in-ground niches for interment of cremated remains.

2021 interments: 46 Total number of veterans interred: 171

Ft. Stanton Merchant Marine & Military Cemetery (*right photo*)

Since 2017, DVS has managed the adjacent Ft. Stanton Merchant Marine & Military Cemetery, which opened in 1899 to bury members of the U.S. Merchant Marines who perished from Tuberculosis while being treated at the adjacent Ft. Stanton Hospital. The cemetery also accepted burials from hospital staff and local-area veterans. More than 1,000 remains are interred at the old cemetery, which stopped accepting burials in 2014.



Gallup State Veterans Cemetery

A second facility, the Gallup State Veterans Cemetery (*left photo*) opened on Memorial Day 2019. The 20.6-acre, \$6.6 million cemetery has space 443 in-ground crypts, 140 in-ground cremains gravesites, and 400 columbarium niches.

2021 interments: 55 Total number of veterans interred: 150

Angel Fire State Veterans Cemetery (*right photo*)

The latest facility, the Angel Fire State Veterans Cemetery, opened on July 23, 2020 as the third state veterans cemetery managed by DVS. The 10.3-acre, \$3.2 million dollar cemetery is located in the meadow below the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and features 100 in-ground crypts, 100 in-ground cremains gravesites, and 200 columbarium niches.

2021 interments: 42 Total number of veterans interred: 71



Carlsbad State Veterans Cemetery A fourth state veterans cemetery is currently in the pre-construction planning phase to be built in Carlsbad. DVS anticipates VA funding to be approved in the next two years.

Military Honors Burial Program: Providing *The Final Salute*

There are 33 all-volunteer Honor Guards throughout the state to provide a military funeral and “final salute” for deceased honorably discharged veterans.

The DVS Cemeteries & Memorials Bureau oversees the state’s *Military Honors Burial Program* which, courtesy of these Honor Guards, provides a burial befitting someone who was honorably discharged from military service.



The Honor Guards are composed of trained uniformed men and women to perform the ceremonial military funeral duties of covering and uncovering of a casket with an American flag, the folding and presentation of the flag to a widow or family member, a rifle volley, and bugle rendition of *Taps*.

This service is provided free to the family of a deceased honorably-discharged veteran. DVS ensures that all units undergo annual training, and are compensated for their duties with a small stipend for each service performed.

It is up to a veterans’ family and/or a local funeral home to schedule an Honor Guard at a funeral. Any veterans’ service organization can form an Honor Guard. Please contact the DVS State Cemetery Division for more information.

New Mexico’s Honor Guards

ACOMA

American Legion Post 116
PO Box 116
Acoma Pueblo, NM 87034
(505) 362-2868

ALBUQUERQUE

American Legion Post 69
9000 4th St. NW
Alameda, NM 87114
(505) 379-1136

ALBUQUERQUE

Women Veterans of NM
PO Box 36648
Albuquerque, NM 87176
(505) 306-3756

ALAMOGORDO

Marine Corps League Det. 850
PO Box 4171
Alamogordo, NM 88311
(575) 434-4774

ALBUQUERQUE

Marine Corps League Det. 381
PO Box 81552
Albuquerque, NM 87198
(505) 926-0600

CAPITAN

American Legion Post 57
PO Box 245
Capitan, NM 88316
(505) 354-3421

ALBUQUERQUE

American Legion Post 13
1201 Mountain Road NE
Albuquerque, NM 87102
(505) 243-1901

ALBUQUERQUE

47th NM Regiment Honor Guard
PO Box 21842
Albuquerque, NM 87154
(505) 298-9800

CARLSBAD

Carlsbad Veterans Honor
Guard PO Box 605
Carlsbad, NM 88220
(575) 885-4834

(list continues on next page)

CUBA

American Legion Post 23
PO Box 1074
Cuba, NM 87013
(575) 385-6787

FARMINGTON

VFW Post 2182
5513 Highway 64
Farmington, NM 87401
(505) 327-2182

GRANTS/BLUEWATER

Mt. Taylor TSO DZIL Honor
Guard/PO Box 215
Bluewater, NM 87005
(505) 280-5483

LAS CRUCES

El Perro Diablo Detachment #478
PO Box 7322
Las Cruces, NM 88006
(575) 523-1236

PORTALES

American Legion Post 31
PO Box 275
Portales, NM 88130
(575) 226-0302

ROSWELL

Roswell Veterans Honor Guard
702 Broken Arrow
Roswell, NM 88201
(575) 623-8985

SANTA FE

VFW Post 2951
307 Montezuma St.
Santa Fe, NM 87504
(505) 983-9045

SILVER CITY

American Legion Post 18
2323 Kimberly Drive
Silver City, NM 88061
(575) 338-2460

ESPAÑOLA

American Legion Post 17
PO Box 1273
Española, NM 87532
(505) 753-6712

FRUITLAND

Upper Fruitland Chapter
PO Box 1257
Fruitland, NM 87416
(505) 960-5032

HOBBS

Lea Co. Marine Corps League
PO Box 862
Hobbs, NM 88240
(575) 399-9307

LAS VEGAS

Vietnam Veterans/Northern NM
Chapter 1063 Honor Guard
PO Box 3211
Las Vegas, NM 87701

RATON

VFW Post 1793
PO Box 716
Raton, NM 87740
(575) 445-3318

SANTA CRUZ

DAV/Luchetti Castner Ch. 13
PO Box 1759 Santa Cruz, NM
87567

SHIPROCK

VFW Post 9517
PO Box 2506
Shiprock, NM 87420
(505) 327-2182

SOCORRO

DAV Chapter 24
PO Box 1584
Socorro, NM 87801
(575) 418-7513

ESTANCIA

American Legion Post 22
PO Box 656
Estancia, NM 87016
(505) 384-3096

GRANTS

VFW Post 3221
202 Davis Street
Grants, NM 87020
(505) 287-2328

ISLETA PUEBLO

Isleta Pueblo Veterans Association
PO Box 338
Isleta, NM 87002
(505) 514-7332

MORA

VFW Post 1131
PO Box 0555
Mora, NM 87732
(575) 387-2618

RIO RANCHO

Marine Corps League Det. 1316
PO Box 44304
Rio Rancho, NM 87174
(505) 892-5618

SANTA FE

American Legion Post 1
1601 Berry Ave.
Santa Fe, NM 87505
(505) 469-6270

SILVER CITY

Marine Corps League Det. 1328
PO Box 2251
Silver City, NM 88062
(575) 574-0361

TAOS

VFW Post 3259
523 Upper Ranchitos Road
Taos, NM 87571
(575) 779-7850



The Forgotten Heroes Funeral Program

The New Mexico Department of Veterans Services' *Forgotten Heroes Funeral Program* ensures that, in the event no family member comes forward to claim the body of a veteran upon death, the veteran will be provided with a military funeral at the Santa Fe National Cemetery.

The program was developed in 2009 through a collaborated effort between DVS, Bernalillo County, and the State Office of the Medical Investigator to provide military funerals for unclaimed deceased Bernalillo County veterans whose cremated remains had been kept in possession by local funeral homes. DVS and Bernalillo county expressed a desire to provide a funeral befitting someone who had sacrificed to serve our country as a member of the United States Armed Forces.

The Forgotten Heroes Program was then introduced to all 33 counties in New Mexico. The program designates the state as the family of record of any verified unclaimed deceased veteran. Verification of an honorable discharge from the United States Armed Forces is done by county officials and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

After an unclaimed deceased veteran is cremated, DVS takes possession of the cremains and contacts the Santa Fe National Cemetery and an Honor Guard to provide a military funeral. The public is invited to serve as "family"—with the governor delivering the eulogy—providing the farewell and final salute these fallen veterans have earned through their service to our country....and ensuring that they are not forgotten in the end.



The above photos are from the September 23, 2021 Forgotten Heroes Funeral, where the unclaimed cremated remains of 22 deceased veterans were laid to rest with military honors at the Santa Fe National Cemetery. Due to state health department COVID-19 safety protocols, safety masks were required to be worn by everyone in attendance.

New Mexico Adjutant General Ken Nava presented the flag used to cover the urns to Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham (above left photo).

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire



The DVS Cemetery & Monuments Bureau manages the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire—the first formal Vietnam War memorial in the country. It is at the base of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains and along the Enchanted Circle Scenic Byway in northeastern New Mexico.

The Memorial was built by Albuquerque residents Victor and Jeanne Westphall, the parents of U.S. Marine 1st Lt. David

Westphall who was among sixteen Marines killed in an ambush on May 22, 1968 in South Vietnam.



**USMC 1st Lt.
David Westphall**

The Westphalls were compelled to build a 32-acre memorial honoring not only their son, but all Americans who served during the war. It was dedicated in 1971—on the three-year anniversary of David's death. The monument received national attention and is credited for inspiring the creation of the national Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. in 1982. Five years later, the Westphall Memorial was recognized by Congress as a memorial of national significance. In 2004, the David Westphall Foundation donated the Memorial to the New Mexico State Parks Division—becoming the state's 33rd state park.



On July 3, 2017, management of the Memorial was transferred from the state parks division to DVS. Legislators agreed with the following reasoning successfully argued by both agencies:

“The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is not a park. It is not a place for families to picnic or hike. It is hallowed ground for visitors to reflect upon and honor the service and sacrifice of American service members during the Vietnam War. It is especially sacred for family and friends of the 58,200 who lost their lives—398 of whom were from New Mexico.”

2021 Visitor Count

In the spring of 2021, the Memorial's museum was opened after being closed for most of 2020 due to COVID-19 travel and public gathering restrictions. Safety masks are still required to be worn by all visitors to the indoor museum, per state department of health COVID-19 safety protocols.

For the 2021 calendar year, 54,885 people from across the country visited the Memorial.



HEALTHCARE DIVISION



The mandate of the DVS Healthcare Division is to educate veterans about VA and non-VA health care, and help veterans engage and navigate the process to apply for health care.

The division has formed a strong partnership with the New Mexico VA Health Care System (NMVAHCS) <https://www.albuquerque.va.gov>—which provides the bulk of VA health care for veterans in New Mexico. The

NMVAHCS encompasses the main Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center in Albuquerque, the fifteen VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) throughout the state, and the four regional Vet Centers (Farmington, Santa Fe, Albuquerque, Las Cruces) that provide behavioral health counseling for veterans.

More information about the CBOCs and Vet Centers can be found at:

www.va.gov/directory/Guide/state.asp?STATE=NM.

As part of an aggressive effort to educate and assist veterans, the health care division and the NMVAHCS collaborate on conferences and outreach visits throughout the state. For veterans in the southern, eastern, and southeastern part of New Mexico, the DVS Health Care Division collaborates with the El Paso VA Health Care System (<https://www.elpaso.va.gov>), the Amarillo VA Health Care System in Amarillo, TX (<https://www.amarillo.va.gov>), and the West Texas VA Health Care System in Big Spring, TX, (<https://www.bigspring.va.gov>). The health care division can also assist veterans who choose VA-approved, non-VA health care options, and veterans who are not eligible for VA health care.

The Highly Rural Veterans Transportation Program

The DVS Health Care Division launched the DVS Highly Rural Transportation Program in January of 2020 to address a critical need facing many rural New Mexico veterans: the lack of transportation options for accessing their VA health care. To address this problem, DVS successfully applied for a federal U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs (VA) Highly Rural Veterans Transportation grant.



Under the grant, DVS is collaborating with the New Mexico VA Health Care System's Transportation Program, the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), and other transportation agencies to provide free round trip rides to and from a veteran's home and their VA or VA-approved medical appointments. The initial launch of the program provided these rides to veterans in nine of the 15 most highly rural counties in the state as identified by VA: Cibola, Colfax, Guadalupe, Harding, Mora, Quay, San Miguel, Socorro, and Union.

In September 2021, the healthcare coordination division signed an amendment for additional dollars to serve the six remaining highly rural counties: Catron, De Baca, Hidalgo, Lincoln, Sierra, and Torrance. With this increase in service, additional transportation vendors will be secured.

For the last quarter of 2021 (October through December) 96 rides and 19,911 miles of travel were provided for veterans to medical appointments. Veterans traveled more miles this quarter than in other quarters, particularly in December, when 11,351 miles were traveled.

Veterans in these 15 counties must make reservations at least three days in advance of their appointment by calling (505) 429-5906 Monday through Friday from 9am-5pm.

Suicide Awareness and Prevention

Veteran suicide awareness and prevention is another key platform for the DVS Healthcare Division. The division is a key partner in the city of Albuquerque's participation in the national *Mayor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families* organized by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Albuquerque was one of eight cities selected to participate to form interagency teams to increase suicide prevention support for veterans in their communities. The goal is to reduce suicides among service members, veterans and their families using a public health approach to suicide prevention. https://www.va.gov/homeless/mayors_challenge.asp



Veteran Homelessness

Ending veteran homelessness is another focus of the DVS Health Care Division. DVS is a strong supporter of the New Mexico Veterans Integration Center ("the VIC") in Albuquerque—a registered non-profit agency...and the state's only shelter for homeless veterans.

The DVS Health Care Division participates in outreaches by the VIC to help homeless veterans get their earned VA or state veterans benefits. DVS veterans service officers refers veterans who are identified as homeless or at-risk to the VIC for immediate short-term and long-term "re-integration" assistance. www.nmdvs.org

In the 2021 Legislature, State Sen. Harold Pope, Jr. (D-Bernalillo), a retired U.S. Air Force captain, appropriated nearly \$200,000 from his office's discretionary fund to DVS for assisting homeless and disabled veterans in New Mexico. The funds will be used for providing a day shelter, transitional housing, meals, clothing, training for service dogs, transportation, a women veteran conference and a new COVID homeless veteran vaccination program developed to be developed by the DVS Healthcare Division.

The New Mexico State Veterans Home

DVS provides benefits assistance for residents of the state veterans home in Truth or Consequences. DVS veterans service officers regularly make outreach visits to the home to assist residents, their families, and staff with filing VA claims, filing for state veterans benefits, or helping with anything else the veteran needs help with.

The home sits on sixteen picturesque acres near Elephant Butte Lake. It is the only state-managed facility dedicated to the long-term housing and care of elderly honorably discharged veterans, their spouses, or parents of service members killed in combat action. The facility has 135 nursing home and 10 assisted living beds--providing long term memory care, and assisted living care.



A new \$24 million Memory & Long Term Assisted Care wing (*right photo*) opened in 2017. The 68,000 square foot state-of-the-art facility features a 39-bed long-term memory care unit, a 20-bed skilled nursing unit, a rehabilitation section for inpatient and outpatient services, and a unique therapy pool heated by water supplied from an underground natural thermal spring. For admission policy and procedures, or for additional information about the home, go to <https://www.nmhealth.org/about/ofm/lctcf/nmsvh>, or call the home at (575) 894-4200 .



DVS Women Veterans Program

The healthcare division manages the DVS Women Veterans Program to specifically focus on assisting New Mexico's women veterans. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), women represent the fastest growing segment of our nation's veteran population. VA data indicates there are 2 million women veterans in America—about 10% of the total veteran population of 19.1 million. In New Mexico, VA data shows there are 16,600 women veterans—nearly 11% of the state's veteran population of 148,377.

These are numbers and percentages unprecedented in the history of our country. Unlike the past, today's women service members are no longer confined to desk or administrative jobs. Women today are serving as pilots, commanders of warships, squadron leaders, senior-ranking officers, and other positions that were traditionally the domain of males.

Women now make **up 15% of active duty and 18% of Guard/Reserve service members**. Based on the upward trend of women in all branches of service, the number of women veterans and female VA users is expected to double again in the next decade.

As American service members retire or fulfill their military commitments, our nation—including the state of New Mexico—must be ready to fulfill its obligation to them for their service.



In addition to providing veterans benefits they've earned for this sacrifice, we must recognize that women veterans may have issues and needs that are unique to women: Many do not identify themselves as veterans—because they are women, believing veterans benefits are only for males, or for those who only went into combat.



Many women veterans are unaware about their right to VA healthcare, or don't know how to access it. Many have been subjected to military sexual trauma. Many women veterans manage family households—and can face family reunification/assimilation issues. Many women face employment barriers encountered by non-veteran women in the civilian workplace.

The DVS Women Veterans Program recognizes these unique needs of women veterans and strives to improve the awareness of their eligibility for VA and state veterans benefits, and community resources at their disposal. The program also advocates for women veterans by assessing their needs, and makes recommendations to the DVS cabinet secretary for changes to existing benefits or possible introduction of future benefits in the state legislature.

As a certified veterans service officer, the DVS program manager can also help women veterans file VA claims or file for state veterans benefits. The program manager is also a consistent presence at statewide veterans events, to raise awareness of the program and how it can help women veterans. The women veterans program also expands its scope by partnering with other organizations that serve women veterans.

Women veterans can contact DVS Women Veteran Program Manager Robin Wilson for assistance at robin.wilson@state.nm.us or (505) 372-9106.

The New Mexico Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC)



The New Mexico Veteran’s Business Outreach Center (VBOC) was created in 2010 by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) to increase the agency’s effort of helping entrepreneurial-minded veterans, transitioning active duty personnel, National Guard & Reserve members, and spouses.

DVS was the only state government agency—and just one of a handful of recipients in the nation--selected by the SBA to create a “one-stop-shop”

to provide this assistance.

New Mexico’s VBOC can help with everything from business planning, start-up and expansion funding, marketing, landing federal contracts, and anything else a small business needs to launch and grow. In addition to providing private one-on-one business counseling, the VBOC conducts numerous *Boots to Business* small-business development workshops throughout the year for veterans...and at military installations for transitioning active-duty service members. The VBOC also presents a yearly *Southwest Veterans Business Conference*—bringing in small-business experts from across the nation to provide invaluable instruction and insight on a much larger scale. *(note: As with the 2020 Southwest Veterans Business Conference, the 2021 conference was also cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic)*

Though based in the DVS Albuquerque Northeast Heights office, the VBOC also serves veterans and active-duty personnel in Colorado. During the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, VBOC Director Rich Coffel can still provide assistance via phone or email: (505) 220-9932 or richardL.coffel@state.nm.us.

VBOC 2021 End-of-Year Report

▪ number of clients counseled	281
▪ number of federal contracts VBOC helped secure for clients	44
—Value of the 44 federal contracts: \$2.5 million	
▪ number of new business started	33
▪ number of jobs created	121
▪ number of Boots-to-Business classes presented	30
▪ COVID-19 assistance inquiries	186

Help for Job-Seeking Veterans



DVS has formed a strong partnership with the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions (DWS) to help veterans, transitioning active-duty service members, and their spouses with employment and training opportunities.

DWS employs a state veterans workforce coordinator to manage the federally funded Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG) program. This grant employs several Local Veterans' Employment Representatives (LVERs) for veterans' job development, and promotes the value hiring of veterans to

employers.

The JVSG program also utilizes the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) to assist eligible veterans who have significant barriers to employment. The grant also provides job readiness skills, job training referrals, and community-based resource referrals. LVERs and DVOPs are assigned to 12 workforce connections centers permanently, and nine workforce connections centers on an out-station basis.



The grant also provides assistance with “Stand Downs” for homeless veterans, the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program, the VA Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program, the VA Supportive Services to Veterans and Families Program, veterans suicide prevention, the veterans court program, veterans job/career fairs, veteran small-business initiatives, apprenticeships, internships, work-study programs, and other veteran-related activities.

Additional information about DWS is available at www.dws.state.nm.us, the Workforce Connections Online System at <https://www.jobs.state.nm.us>, or the U.S. Department of Labor Veterans' Employment and Training Service website at www.dol.gov/vets.

ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES DIVISION

The DVS Administrative Services Division manages all financial and administrative matters for the agency. The division works with the cabinet secretary to create the agency's operational budget—according to the parameters set by the overall state budget passed each year by the state legislature and signed into law by the governor.

In addition, the division oversees all inter and intra-agency administrative, information technology, human resources, supply, safety, and other infrastructure matters.

DVS Expenditures (in dollars)

	FY21 (Actuals) (7/1/20 - 6/30/21)	FY22 (Budgeted) 7/1/21 - 6/30/22
<u>Sources</u>		
General Fund Transfers	5,227,000	5,241,000
Federal Revenue	637,036	697,000
Other Revenue	298,397	209,000
TOTAL	6,162,433	6,147,000
<u>Uses</u>		
Personal Services & Employee Benefits	3,971,940	4,682,800
Contractual Services	228,402	396,600
Other	721,432	966,600
TOTAL	4,921,774	6,046,000
<u>Full-Time Equivalent Employees</u>		
Permanent	63	63
Term	4	4
TOTAL	67	67

THE DVS State Approving Agency Bureau (SAA)



The New Mexico State Approving Agency (SAA) is a division of the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) contracted by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to provide approval, oversight, training, outreach, and liaison activities to ensure the quality and integrity of programs of education and proper administration of GI Bill® benefits. The SAA also provides oversight of programs such as on-the-job training, apprenticeships, vocational flight, licensure & certification, and correspondence for individuals using their GI Bill® benefits.

A key role of the SAA is to review, evaluate, and approve education and training programs for the GI Bill®—ensuring compliance with strict state and federal statutory and regulatory criteria. The SAA accomplishes this by making onsite and other supervisory and inspection visits to educational institutions and training establishments throughout the state. Technical assistance for interested colleges, universities, other postsecondary educational institutions, and training establishments is also provided upon request. In addition to this regulatory responsibility, the SAA is also active in outreach activities throughout the state to promote awareness of the GI Bill® education benefit—advocating for quality and diverse education and training opportunities for veterans and other eligible persons.

The SAA also performs compliance surveys, risk-based surveys, and targeted risk-based reviews to ensure facilities and approved programs are in compliance with all applicable statutory, regulatory, and policy provisions. The SAA verifies the propriety of payments of educational benefits under the provisions of the laws administered by VA. It identifies potential fraud, waste, and abuse by utilizing data and risk factors that are outside of the normal approval and compliance liaison processes.

The SAA also confirms compliance with all approval criteria. It assists educational institution and training establishment officials to determine, on the basis of facts, whether there are deviations from responsibilities and requirements by eligible individuals, educational institutions, or training establishments. The SAA ensures proper action is promptly taken through appropriate channels to correct discrepancies. It will move to discontinue benefits in the event correction is not accomplished in accordance with all applicable provisions of Title 38 of the U.S. Code.

SAA End-of-Year Data For Federal Fiscal Year 2021 (Oct. 1, 2020 – Sep. 30, 2021)

The New Mexico SAA once again received the highest rating of “Satisfactory” by VA.

Number of program and other approvals	1,395
Number of programs and other disapprovals	127
Number of compliance surveys	13
Technical Assistance	1,427
Outreach Events and Other Outreach	78
Number of liaisons w/other state & federal agencies	561

GI Bill® is a registered trademark of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). More information about education benefits offered by VA is available at the official U.S. government website at <https://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill>.



VA Expenditures in New Mexico

Federal FY20 (Oct. 1, 2019-Sep. 30, 2020) (latest data)

Total VA Expenditures	\$1,887,261,000
Compensation & Pensions	974,432,000
Medical Care	809,506,000
Education, Vocational Rehab, Employment	66,098,000
General Operating Expenses	17,917,000
Insurance & Indemnities	8,981,000
Construction	10,288,000
Unique Patients	53,264



2021 Year In Review



January



DVS Launches Highly Rural Veterans Transportation Program to Provide Free Healthcare Transportation

DVS launched the *Rural Veterans Transportation Program* to provide free round-trip rides for veterans to and from their home and VA or VA-approved medical appointments. For this initial-phase launch of the program, DVS contracted with transportation companies to serve veterans in Cibola, Colfax, Guadalupe, and Socorro counties

Funding for the program comes from a renewable grant from VA's Highly Rural Transportation Grant Program, which VA awards to qualified organizations to provide transportation for

veterans in highly rural areas who have difficulty getting VA health care due to the lack of transportation.

VA, which defines a highly rural area as a county with less than seven people per square mile, provided DVS with a list of 15 qualifying New Mexico counties. (*expansion to the remaining nine counties came later in the year. More information is on page 22.*) Reservations must be made three days in advance for all rides and can be done by calling (505) 429-5906 Monday through Friday between 9am-5pm. In accordance with ongoing COVID-19 safety protocols, veterans must wear a safety mask for the duration of the trip (drivers will be wearing safety masks).

WW II Veteran Finally Gets High School Diploma

It took 78 years, but 96-year-old World War II Navy veteran Orlando S. Romero finally received his high school diploma on January 14.

The former Seaman 1st Class received his diploma through *Operation Recognition*, a program developed by DVS that provides veterans in New Mexico a high school diploma if they left high school to serve in World War II, the Korean War, or the Vietnam War.



Prior to the post-Vietnam War era, many young men in America cut short their high school education to serve in the military. Many, like Mr. Romero, were drafted as soon as they turned 18. Others enlisted—often lying about their age. After the Vietnam War, graduating from high school or passing the General Education Development tests (GED) became a mandatory pre-requisite for military service. Mr. Romero was drafted in 1943 shortly after he turned 18 in the middle of his senior year at Albuquerque High School. Upon returning home from the war, he immediately began looking for employment—working as a janitor, a furniture maker, and other jobs to support his family.

It wasn't until a few years ago that he learned about Operation Recognition. After contacting DVS, a high school diploma from Albuquerque Public Schools was finally presented to him at a socially distanced graduation ceremony in the gymnasium of Albuquerque's Robert F. Kennedy Charter School.

DVS encourages any pre-Vietnam War era veteran who interrupted their high school education to contact DVS about filing the paperwork to receive their diplomas. For more information, please contact DVS State Benefits Bureau Manager Jeff George at jeff.george@state.nm.us or (505) 699-4087.

February



Sonya L. Smith
DVS Cabinet Secretary

Sonya L. Smith Confirmed as DVS Cabinet Secretary

Sonya L. Smith was unanimously confirmed by the New Mexico Senate on February 17 as cabinet secretary of the New Mexico Department of DVS.

The vote was 38-0, officially naming her as the fifth DVS secretary—and first African American to serve as head of the agency. She had been serving on an interim basis since her nomination for the position by Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham the previous October after the retirement of then-Secretary Judy Griego. Though the state senators met and in-person in the senate chamber, COVID-19 safety protocols were in effect: The senators were wearing safety masks and observed social distancing, and Secretary Smith took part remotely via Zoom.

During the senate floor confirmation vote, senators from both sides of the aisle were quick to praise the nomination, citing Secretary-Designate Smith’s strong background in healthcare—which many acknowledge as one of the most important benefits for veterans.

“I rise in strong support of Secretary-Designate Smith,” said Senate Majority Floor Leader Peter Wirth (D-Santa Fe). “She has the skill-set that is really important for this job. We need someone who can help veterans navigate VA health care.” She also said something that really resonates with me—that every day is veterans day to her. My door will always be open to her for any help.” (see page 32 for more information about Secretary Smith)

DVS VSO Dedicates “Huey” Helicopter Monument

DVS Carlsbad-based veterans service officer Dagmar Youngberg (right photo), who is also the chair of the Carlsbad Veterans Memorial Board, joined a handful of city officials and veterans for a final dedication of a Huey helicopter on February 19 at Veterans Memorial Park.

A bronze plaque was unveiled (photo below)—the final touch of an ongoing dedication following installation of the helicopter last year. The unveiling of the plaque, said Ms. Youngberg, finalized the process.



“This is the final touch in welcoming this warhorse to its new and permanent resting home here in Carlsbad,” she said. “For Vietnam veterans the Huey is an iconic symbol of their war. We’re proud to have it on display here at the park as a tribute to those who answered the call of duty to bravely serve our country when they were called to serve.”



The helicopter was shot down—with both crew members surviving and being rescued. After the helicopter itself was recovered, a few years later it was involved in a mid-air collision at 1,000 feet. Again, it was repaired, and went on to continue seeing further combat action. After serving the Army for several years after the war, it was bought by a private collector in Texas. The Carlsbad Veterans Memorial Board purchased it from the collector in 2020.

February (continued)

DVS VSO Featured in VA's National Women's History Month Campaign

DVS Farmington-based veterans service officer Beverly Charley was selected as one of 27 women veterans from across the country for a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) national campaign celebrating Women's History Month.



Beverly Charley
DVS Farmington-based VSO

The women were highlighted in *2021 Trailblazers: Women Veterans Leading the Way*—a campaign by VA's Center for Women Veterans (CWV) honoring women the VA considers as trailblazers for their actions during and after their military service. The campaign showcases the impact these women have made on a single event or action or demonstrated over time in the areas of education, employment, entrepreneurship, homelessness, law, mental health and wellness. Ms. Charley was honored as one of the driving forces behind *Operation Stand Down/Project Hand-Up*, an event for homeless veterans in Farmington she helped organize in 2012 to provide clothing, a hot meal, housing assistance, counseling, and other services for homeless veterans. It is now an annual event in late October/early November. The campaign also honored her 14-years of service in the U.S. Army, and her additional role at DVS as the agency's tribal liaison tasked with working with the New Mexico Indian Affairs Department on Native American issues. For more information on VA's Center for Women Veterans 2021 Trailblazers: Women Veterans Leading the Way campaign, and a look at the 27 honorees:

<https://www.va.gov/womenvet/cwv/trailblazers2021.asp>

March



DVS Hosts Facebook "Live" COVID-19 Vaccine Discussion With NMVAHCS & NMDOH

New Mexico VA Health Care System (NMVAHCS) Director Andrew Welch, other NMVAHCS staff members, and New Mexico Department of Health (DOH) Communications Director Matt Bieber joined DVS Healthcare Coordination Division Director Jemia Warner for a "live" Facebook discussion about COVID-19 vaccine options for New Mexico's veterans. The top messages shared by all guests:

- Get vaccinated (Moderna, Pfizer, or Johnson & Johnson)
- Veterans in New Mexico have two options to get their vaccines: Through the New Mexico Department of Health—the option for all New Mexicans—or the NMVAHCS, through the Murphy VA Medical Center in Albuquerque or the 15 VA-managed community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs) throughout the state.
- Veterans should register with both provider systems—and then once they make an appointment with one, to cancel the other one in order to free up the space for others.

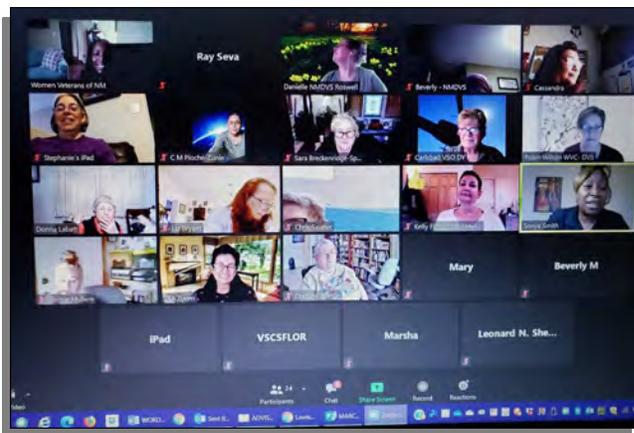
At the time of this March 5 online discussion, vaccines were available to anyone 75 years old or older, health care professionals, first responders, residents and staff of nursing homes, and anyone 16 years old or older with medical conditions deemed as risk factors for developing COVID complications.

March (continued)

DVS Hosts Online Women Veterans “Listening Post”

DVS and the group *Women Veterans of New Mexico* hosted a live online Zoom meeting on March 16 to provide women veterans the chance to meet the secretary and voice their suggestions for improving service to women veterans.

One of the key concerns raised by several participants was the need for DVS and all service agencies to aggressively reach out to the state’s 16,000 women veterans—whom many in the discussion say are not aware of their VA or state veterans benefits.



“Many older-generation veterans didn’t think they were veterans, so they weren’t entitled to any veterans benefits,” said *Women Veterans of New Mexico* President and retiree U.S. Army Lt. Col. Patricia “Pat” Gaston of Albuquerque. “They think that, because they didn’t deploy overseas, they weren’t veterans. We need to change that thinking.”

“I’d like to see more outreach in the rural areas of New Mexico,” said Cassandra Morgan of Gallup—a former U.S. Marine Corps heavy equipment mechanic and a member of the Navajo Veterans Advisory Council.

Other suggestions were the need for all women veterans service groups to communicate with each other, educate women about the G.I. Bill to pursue a post-high school education to increase their career earnings capability, and the desire for state women veterans conferences or conventions.

April

2nd Phase Launch of the Highly Rural Veterans Transportation Program

DVS launched Phase 2 of its *Rural Veterans Transportation Program* to expand service to include veterans in Quay, Harding, Mora, San Miguel, and Union counties. The program, which provides free round trip service for veterans to and from their home and any VA or VA-approved medical appointment, was launched two months earlier with initial service for veterans in Cibola, Colfax, Guadalupe, and Socorro Counties. (see page 22 for more information about the program)

DVS also reminded veterans in these nine counties that this service could be used for veterans with appointments to get their COVID vaccines. Veterans must make a reservation for these free round trip rides at least three days in advance of a medical appointment by calling (505) 429-5906 Monday through Friday from 9am-5pm. Upon pickup, veterans will be required to show proof of veteran status to the driver—who, per COVID-19 safety protocol, will be wearing a mask. Veterans will also be required to wear safety masks.



VA defines a highly rural county as one with less than seven people per square mile, and provided a list of qualifying counties. DVS submitted a grant renewal to serve the remaining six counties on the list.

April (continued)



DVS Hosts Veterans Property Tax Exemption/Waiver Curbside Service at Its Albuquerque NE Heights Office

DVS assisted more than 500 veterans and unmarried widows of veterans at a curbside property tax exemption & waiver service event April 19 & 20 at the its Albuquerque Northeast Heights office.

DVS staff, wearing safety masks in compliance with the state COVID-19 public safety order still in place, provided “carhop-style” service filing for the veterans property tax exemption or waiver, which are available for veterans or unmarried widows of veterans. The property tax exemption is a

\$4,000 reduction off the taxable value of the veteran’s primary residence. The property tax waiver is available for veterans rated by the VA as 100% service-connected permanent-and-total disabled.

It took an average of only 15-minutes for staff to verify and process the applications inside the DVS office. A property tax exemption or waiver certificate of eligibility was then brought out to the veteran or widow for them to give to their county assessor’s office to complete the process.

DVS has produced a video recapping the drive-up curbside and has posted it on the agency’s website:

<https://youtu.be/Q69VD0EnLMU>

May

Memorial Day Commemorated by DVS at Its Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire

DVS commemorated Memorial Day with a brief ceremony at its Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire. Due to public safety concerns regarding the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the ceremony was closed to the public. But a handful of people who stopped by the memorial were not turned away by DVS staff.



After a governor’s Memorial Day proclamation was read aloud, a memorial wreath was presented by Vietnam War veteran

Eugene Stefanko, who came all the way from his home in Latrobe, PA, to do the honors (*above photo, at right in green shirt*) Stefanko was a member of the same U.S. Marine Corps unit with 1st Lt. David Westphall, a native of Albuquerque who was killed when they were attacked by North Vietnamese forces on May 22, 1968, near Con Thien, South Vietnam.

Westphall’s parents, Victor and Jeanne, built the memorial to honor him and all who served in the Vietnam War. Stefanko is the last surviving member of the unit that came under attack. DVS has produced a video showing highlights of the ceremony, with messages from DVS Secretary Sonya Smith, members of New Mexico’s congressional delegation, and attendees of the ceremony. Please go to www.nmdvs.org. Click on the “News & Events” tab in the upper right, and then click on “Recent Press Releases.”

June

Governor Lujan Grisham Tours the Angel Fire State Veterans Cemetery & Vietnam Veterans Memorial

Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham made her first official visit to the Angel Fire Veterans Cemetery and adjacent Vietnam Veterans Memorial on June 28. She was greeted at the cemetery by DVS Cabinet Secretary Sonya Smith, DVS directors and staff. The ten-acre cemetery, managed by the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services, opened for interments a year earlier—but the height of the COVID-19 pandemic cancelled a scheduled opening ceremony.



At her visit, the governor placed roses atop some of the 40 headstones to honor all fallen veterans and their spouses interred at the cemetery.

After placing the roses, the governor then made her way up the hill...to the adjacent Vietnam Veterans Memorial—also managed by DVS—for a tour of the facility initially built in 1973 by Albuquerque residents Victor and Jeanne Westphall as a tribute to their son, U.S. Marine Lieutenant David Westphall. Lt. Westphall, along with 16 other marines, were killed in action by North Vietnamese forces on May 22, 1968, outside Con Thien, South Vietnam. DVS assumed management of the Memorial in 2017. It now honors all who served in Vietnam, and was the first Vietnam War memorial in the nation. It also served as an inspiration to build the national Vietnam Veterans memorial in Washington, D.C. which opened ten years later.



DVS Cabinet Secretary Smith Honors WWII Veterans at a Special Ceremony in Albuquerque

DVS Cabinet Secretary Sonya L. Smith was among a group of dignitaries honoring World War II veterans for their service at a ceremony on June 26 at the New Mexico Veterans Memorial in Albuquerque.

The ceremony, hosted by Honor Flight of Northern New Mexico, was in lieu of a scheduled annual “honor flight” in the fall that was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The flight would’ve taken the veterans and chaperones on a free two-day trip to Washington, D.C. to visit the National World War II Memorial and other war memorials.

"On a personal note, I stand on your shoulders," she told the World War II veterans. "Your sacrifice has paved the way--not only for me to serve in the Air Force, but to now serve you in my current position today. My staff and I don't take this lightly. We are here to now serve you."

Another speaker was Maj. Gen. Ken Nava, the Adjutant General of New Mexico, handed out his Coins for Excellence to the veterans on behalf, he said, of the 4,000 Soldiers and Airmen of the New Mexico National Guard.

"As I walk by and shook all your hands, I saw both my grandfathers, Thomas Arrey and Eleuterio Nava, who served alongside you and World War II, one in the European theater and one in the Pacific theater," said Nava. "What an incredible group of individuals you are, members the greatest generation and I thank you for your sacrifice."

June (continued)



DVS Secretary Smith Attends Juneteenth Ceremonies in Albuquerque and Española

DVS Secretary Sonya Smith attended ceremonies in Albuquerque and Española on June 18 and 19 celebrating *Juneteenth*—the day commemorating when Union soldiers arrived in Galveston, TX, on June 19, 1865, to free a large population of slaves still in captivity—more than 2-1/2 years after all slaves were set free by President Abraham Lincoln’s signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. Juneteenth became our nation’s newest federal holiday on June 17, when President Joe Biden signed the Juneteenth National Independence Day Act into law.

Speaking at the ceremonies in Albuquerque’s Civic Center on June 18 and Española’s plaza the following day, Secretary Smith noted the military’s role on that day 156 years ago--calling the actions of General Granger’s troops “...one of the great civic and humanitarian missions in our nation’s history. It remains one of our military’s proudest moments in the eyes of African Americans.”

She then read the governor’s proclamation at both events, which read in part “in 2006, New Mexico became the nineteenth state in th nation to recognize the important role African Americans have played in shaping New Mexico’s history...through contributions socially, intellectually, culturally, and with a willingness to serve and defend our nation through military service.

U.S. Senator Ben Ray Lujan Meets w/DVS Staff and Veterans in Gallup

U.S. Senator Ben Ray Lujan (D-New Mexico) met with DVS staff and veterans at a meeting in Gallup on June 30 to hear concerns about veterans issues in the area. *(photo/standing at far right)*



The meeting also provided a chance for veterans to meet with officials from the city and the Navajo nation and meet the two DVS veterans service officers from the DVS Gallup office-- Durrell Tsosie and Ben Stewart.

One of the issues raised was the lack of transportation for veterans to get to their medical appointments— either at the Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center in Albuquerque, or the VA-managed community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs) in Gallup or Farmington.

DVS Secretary Sonya L. Smith and DVS division directors provided details of the Highly Rural Veterans Transportation (HRVT) Program launched by DVS this spring to provide such a service to some of the more rural areas in the state. The program has initially started with service to neighboring Cibola County. Service is now up to 9 of the 15 counties identified by VA as highly rural. DVS will be expanding service to the remaining six counties by the spring of 2022.

DVS VSO’s Tsosie and Stewart also helped several veterans with filing VA claims and filing for state veterans benefits.

July

DVS Field Offices Reopen for In-Person/In-Office Visits

In the first week of July, DVS veterans service officers (VSOs) opened their field offices for in-office visits. These openings came more than a year after all state offices in New Mexico were closed for in-person visits due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic--and VSOs shifting to remote/telework assistance. All office visits began on an appointment-only basis—and have continued in this manner. Safety masks are required to be worn by the VSOs and all visiting veterans. Social distancing is also in place--anyone who shows up early for an appointment, or while a veteran is being served, is asked to wait in their vehicle.



During the office reopenings, DVS Cabinet Secretary Sonya Smith said that, while DVS did not miss a beat serving the state's veterans via remote service, the staff was eager to getting back to working in their offices.

“The pandemic did show us that we as an agency can offer the same level of excellent service by email, phone, or video conferencing,” she said. “But the pandemic reminded us that, for most veterans, nothing can ever replace good old-fashioned, face-to-face service—and we are all eager to start re-connecting in person with veterans again.”

All DVS VSOs continue to offer remote service by phone or email. Any veteran...from anywhere in the state...can contact any DVS VSO for phone or email assistance.



DVS Presents Gift to Retiring NMVAHCS Director Andrew Welch

DVS Cabinet Secretary Sonya L. Smith presented a framed DVS commemorative poster to retiring New Mexico VA Health Care System (NMVAHCS) Director Andrew Welch on July 26 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 her for the presentation at a ceremony at the Albuquerque Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center were (*photo, from left to right*): DVS Women Veterans Program Manager Robin Wilson, DVS State Benefits Director Ed Mendez, DVS Cabinet Secretary Smith, retiring NMVAHCS Director Welch, DVS Field Services Director Larry Campos, and DVS Veterans Business Outreach Center Director Rich Coffel.

Director Welch began his distinguished 34-year career with VA in 1987 as a dietitian at the Audie L. Murphy VAMC in San Antonio. He served six years as the director of the Amarillo VAHCS before being named NMVAHCS director in 2014.

August



DVS Holds Quarterly Briefing—the First Since in More Than a Year Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

DVS held a quarterly briefing at the New Mexico Veterans Memorial in Albuquerque on August 6—the agency’s first briefing in 21-months due to the halt of state agency public gatherings due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

DVS Cabinet 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—and were seated in a socially-distanced manner in accordance with ongoing

COVID safety protocols.

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 Program to provide free rides for veterans to medical appointments in nine rural counties, raising awareness of veteran suicide and suicide prevention, relaunching the agency’s women veterans program, and opening the Angel Fire State Veterans Cemetery.

She then outlined four goals for DVS: Increasing agency outreach, increasing claims filing and coordination of eligible benefits statewide, expanding DVS coordination with other agencies, and reaching out to recently returned service members from the Afghanistan troop drawdown.

Representatives from the following agencies also gave presentations about their efforts: The New Mexico National Guard, the New Mexico VA Health Care System, the Albuquerque VA Regional Office, and the Santa Fe National Cemetery.

DVS Deputy Secretary Osterhage Joins U.S. Sen. Ben Ray Lujan in Tour of Veterans Wellness Center

DVS Deputy Secretary Bryan Osterhage (*at left in photo*) joined U.S. Senator Ben Ray Lujan (D-N.M.) (*middle of photo*) on August 31 for a tour of the Forward Flag Veterans Wellness Center in Albuquerque.

The visit was to highlight support for veterans during National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, observed nationally every September.



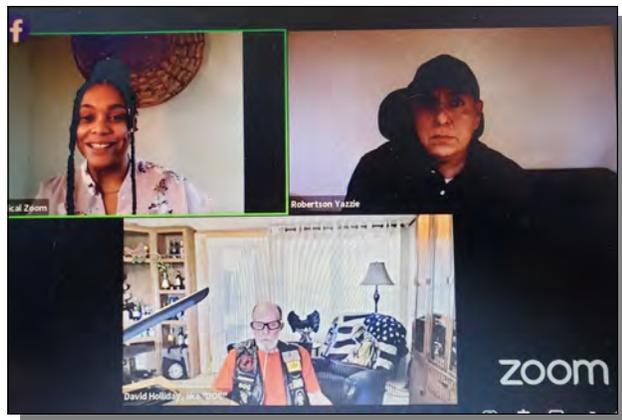
According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), 20 veterans take their life every day. Forward Flag is committed to reducing veteran suicide in New Mexico —striving to raise awareness of these high rates and work with family and friends of the veteran to offer alternatives for them.

Forward Flag also offers activities to engage at-risk veterans and their families in various social activities such as service dog training, archery, leather crafts, game nights, weight training, and fishing. Soon to come are quine therapy and kayaking. More information about Forward Flag can be found at <https://forwardflag.org/>.

August (continued)

DVS Hosts Two More Online Discussions on Suicide Awareness & Prevention

DVS hosted two online discussions on September 3 as part of its continuing effort to raise awareness and foster collaboration dealing with veteran suicide. In a morning public Facebook “live” discussion, DVS Healthcare Coordination Division Director Jemia Warner was joined by representatives from the New Mexico VA Health Care System (NMVAHCS) and New Mexico American Legion District 7 to promote a September 11 “S.A.V.E. Motorcycle Ride” in southern and northern New Mexico. These multiple-stop, all-day rides provided learning opportunities at each stop about suicide awareness and prevention assistance. Much of the discussion was about the value motorcycle rides provide for raising awareness about what many veterans consider a taboo topic.



In an afternoon “Lunch-and-Learn” session among select DVS and NMVAHCS staff, DVS Healthcare Coordination Division Director Warner was joined by NMVAHCS Clinical Psychologist Dr. Brenda Mayne, PhD., who delved more deeply into the suicide prevention and awareness programs offered at the main Murphy VA Medical Center in Albuquerque, and the state’s four Vet Centers (Farmington, Santa Fe, Albuquerque, and Las Cruces). She also stressed the importance of interventions by family and friends of at-risk veterans—which she said doesn’t have to be a big, dramatic ordeal. “Simply asking ‘Are you OK?’ is an intervention in itself,” she said. “This simple question reduces suicide risk by 90%...for the next week or so. But this is a big factor—it buys more time to seek the necessary help--but you have to go through with it.”



Vietnam War Veteran Donates Unique Poster to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire

U.S. Marine Corps Cpl. and Vietnam War veteran Rick Everington (*at left in photo*) stopped by the DVS-managed Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire on August 6 to donate a poster. It is one of only two made for a 2016 reunion of the USMC 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, 3rd Division/Delta Company’s Landing Zone/Loon Hill 484. That unit’s commanding officer, Lt. Michael E. Jackson, graduated from basic training 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 (*at right*). “We are humbled and would like to thank Delta Company for this generous gesture.”

September



Unclaimed Cremated Remains of 22 Veterans Laid to Rest at the 2021 Forgotten Heroes Funeral

The cremated remains of 22 military veterans who, upon death were unclaimed by family for burial, were laid to rest at the 2021 Forgotten Heroes Funeral on September 23 at the Santa Fe National Cemetery. The annual funeral is presented by DVS, Bernalillo County, the New Mexico National Guard, the Santa Fe National Cemetery, the State Office of the Medical Investigator, and Daniels Family Funeral Services of Albuquerque to provide a military funeral unclaimed deceased veterans in New Mexico.

Last year's funeral was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This year, Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham delivered the eulogy to a gathering mask-wearing veterans and members of the public.

“Unclaimed is the word given to their remains,” said the Governor. “But today, we come together to claim them...to honor them...and to make clear that we will never forget the sacrifices that our men and women and their families make for our nation...every single day. May each of their souls now rest in peace.”

The urns were escorted from Albuquerque to the cemetery by members from Albuquerque, Santa Fe and the New Mexico State Police, sheriff's deputies from Bernalillo, Sandoval, and Santa Fe counties--and the American Legion Riders. (for a video recap of the funeral: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0TSaTgXGRHE>)

DVS, NM National Guard and AARP-New Mexico Host the 2021 NM Honor Guard Training Conference

DVS, the New Mexico National Guard, and AARP-New Mexico hosted the 2021 New Mexico Honor Guard Training Conference on September 30 in Albuquerque—the annual event that provides information and a learning/training opportunity for the state's all-volunteer honor guards. Last year's conference was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



All honorably discharged deceased veterans of the United States Armed Forces are entitled to a military funeral—provided there is an honor guard available in their community to render honors. Here in New Mexico, the bulk of this duty is performed by nearly 40 all-volunteer honor guards.



At the conference, demonstrations were provided by a New Mexico Army National Guard Honor Guard. The volunteer units then rendered honors, in front of a judging panel, in a simulated military honors funeral.

Here is a link to a video produced by DVS that highlights the demonstration by the NMNG Honor Guard, and the performances by the volunteer honor guards:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hHJC2VDI7us>.

September (continued)

Annual Veterans Memorial Bricklaying Ceremony at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire

More than 800 veterans memorial bricks were placed on the grounds of the DVS-managed Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire on September 4 during an annual Labor Day weekend bricklaying.

The red bricks were purchased through the David Westphall Memorial Foundation by anyone wanting to honor a military service member or veteran--living or deceased. Each brick bears the name of the veteran or service member, their branch of service, and years served. More than one hundred volunteers placed the bricks along the sidewalks of the memorial grounds. Most volunteers were members of the Run For The Wall Foundation that supports active-duty service members, while also honoring the memory of those killed in action, and calling for a full accounting of those still missing in action. The group hosts an annual spring motorcycle ride that begins in Southern California and ends at the National Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. on Memorial Day weekend. The annual bricklaying event at the Angel Fire memorial, which since 2017 has been managed by DVS, serves as a reunion for the riders. Last year's event was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



The more than 800 bricks placed this year is more than the usual 450 to 500 bricks purchased and placed every year. For more information about purchasing bricks for the 2022 ceremony, please contact the Vietnam Veterans Memorial at (575) 377-2293.



Rich Coffel
Veterans Business
Outreach Center Director

DVS Veterans Business Outreach Center Director Honored by the U.S. Small Business Administration

New Mexico Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC) Director Rich Coffel was recognized by the Small Business Administration's (SBA) New Mexico District Office for his outstanding work during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Director Coffel was presented with a certificate citing his "outstanding support for our nation's small businesses, and its continued collaboration with the SBA to deliver critical economic relief programs during the COVID-19 national emergency."

The VBOC is the business development division of DVS. Director Coffel provides "one-stop-shop" assistance for entrepreneurial-minded veterans, transitioning service members, and spouses in New Mexico and Colorado---providing expert counseling focusing on starting, growing, or purchasing a small business or franchise operation. In addition to providing this critical service during the pandemic, Director Coffel—teleworking via email or phone--has also provided timely information about COVID-19 emergency federal and state funds and loans available for veteran-owned small businesses.

The VBOC is located at the DVS Albuquerque Northeast Heights office and currently offers help by appointment only. Please contact Director Coffel at (505) 220-9932 or richardL.coffel@state.nm.us. He can also offer assistance by email or phone.

September (continued)



Free State Fair Admission for Veterans and Service Members on Military & Veterans Day at the State Fair

Veterans and active duty service members, many bringing spouses and family members, enjoyed a day at the New Mexico State Fair on September 14--Military & Veterans Appreciation Day at the State Fair. Veterans and active-duty service members presenting valid ID were admitted free to the fairgrounds on this annual day presented by DVS, the New Mexico National Guard, and the New Mexico State Fair, to honor the state's veterans and service members. At a ceremony on the main stage, DVS Deputy Secretary Bryan Osterhage thanked the state's military community for their service.

“As you enjoy the fair today, take a moment to look around at everybody enjoying this warm, sunny day,” he said. “I want you to remember this: This day is made possible by you--our men and women of our military who have served us. Your sacrifice protects us. Thank you for your service to us all. ”

New Mexico Army National Guard Maj. Gen. Ken Nava and New Mexico VA Health Care System Congressional Liaison Joe Baca also thanked current and former service members. The ceremony concluded with a reading by members of the New Mexico Gold Star Mothers of the names of the 90 service members from New Mexico who've lost their lives since the 9/11 Terrorist Attacks 20-years ago.

DVS VSOs Make Outreach Visit to Kewa Pueblo

DVS made an outreach stop in Kewa Pueblo—formerly known as Santo Domingo Pueblo—on September 30 at the Santo Domingo Health Center. This was one of the first outreaches by DVS since state agencies opened their doors two months earlier for in-person service. All state agency offices had been closed for in-person visits since the spring of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The outreach was by invitation from the Kewa Pueblo Health Corporation. Assistance was provided on an appointment-only basis, and face masks were required to be worn. DVS Veterans Service Officers Martin Márquez (*upper-right photo, in black shirt*), Johnny Martinez, and Dustin Newsom provided helped veterans with filing VA claims, filing for state benefits, and assisted with anything else a veteran needed help with. information about or help for VA claims, state veterans benefits, or help with anything else a veteran needed help with.



DVS Veterans Business Outreach Director Rich Coffel (*left photo, seated at right*) provided counseling for veterans looking to open or expand a small business. Also invited to the outreach was Robert Romero from the Santa Fe Vet Center, who from the privacy of the center's mobile outreach RV provided mental health counseling, and Theresa Quintana from Help NM—who provided information about rental & utilities assistance, education & job training programs, and agricultural subsidies.

October

DVS Cabinet Secretary Smith Addresses Veterans Town Hall Meeting in Clovis

DVS Cabinet Secretary Sonya Smith was invited to give an agency update at a veterans town hall meeting on October 23 in Clovis hosted by American Legion Post 25. 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. 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.



Chief of VA's Lubbock-Levelland Community Based Outpatient Clinical services Dr. Dalton Keel also spoke at the meeting. He addressed questions regarding what many said is a critical shortage of doctors and urgent care staff in Curry County—saying it's a problem small towns across the country are facing, and that VA will look at increasing incentives to bring doctors to the CBOCs in the area.

He also addressed 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.



DVS Provides Assistance at "Stand Downs" For Homeless Veterans in Gallup and Farmington

DVS was among the many state, federal, and local agencies providing assistance at "stand downs" for homeless veterans in Gallup and Farmington in October.

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 (*left photo*)—providing information benefits

information about programs most veterans who stopped by were not even aware of.

On October 8 in Farmington, DVS VSO Beverly Charley coordinated the 9th Annual San Juan County Veterans Stand Down at the San Juan College Health & Human Performance Center. (*right photo/at left*)

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 events have a "don't ask" policy—no one was or will ever be turned away. For video highlights of both stand downs: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?>



November



DVS Cabinet Secretary Smith Speaks at Veterans Day Ceremony in Santa Fe

DVS Cabinet Secretary Sonya Smith was a guest speaker at the city of Santa Fe's annual Veterans Day ceremony on November 11 at the Santa Fe Veterans Memorial.

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

Secretary Smith added that about 430,000 military families relocate every year—posing hardships for the military family unit.

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. Other guest speakers were Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernandez, Santa Fe Mayor Alan Webber, and Maj. Gen. Ken Nava, the adjutant general of New Mexico.



DVS Co-Hosts Special Two-Day "A Veterans Journey Home" Film Series on Veterans Day

DVS, Warrior Films, and the Jean Cocteau Cinema presented *A Veterans Journey Home*—a two-day film series on Veterans Day at the historic 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 (*left photo*). "These films will show us some incredible journeys that 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 also presented a copy of the Congressional Record to World War II veteran Bennie Montoya of Santa Fe (*right 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.



November (continued)

DVS, DOH, & New Mexico State Police Present Pre-Veterans Day Parade at State Veterans Home

DVS, New Mexico State Police, and the New Mexico Department of Health collaborated to organize a special pre-Veterans Day parade on November 6 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, of the vehicles parading in front of the home. “They’re saying hello...and kinda saying they appreciate us. I thought it was really nice, yeah.”



DVS Cabinet Secretary Smith, DVS Women Veterans Program Manager Wilson Appear on Eye On New Mexico

DVS Cabinet Secretary Sonya Smith (*right, in photo*) and DVS Women Veterans Program Manager Robin Wilson (*center*) were guests on KOB-TV’s *Eye On New Mexico* with host Brittany Costello—the NBC-TV New Mexico affiliate’s weekly focusing on news and issues of importance to New Mexicans.

The Veterans Day-themed show was taped on November 2 for airing on November 6 right before the station’s 6pm newscast. One of the topics of discussion was the completion of the “draw down” of U.S. service members from Afghanistan—and what that means for DVS, the VA, and other service agencies.

“We have to be prepared to help these men and women readjust to civilian life—everything from making sure they’re aware of their benefits, see if they need counseling, getting a job, maybe using their GI Bill to go to college—whatever they may need help with,” said Wilson. “DVS is ready to help. We will aggressively reach out to these veterans and their families, through outreach efforts and collaborations with other agencies.”

DVS Secretary Smith and Wilson also talked about the upcoming *A Veterans Journey Home* film series in Santa Fe, and the many upcoming Veterans Day ceremonies around the state—urging viewers to attend an event in their community to show support and appreciation for veterans.

December



DVS, NM Film Office Host Operation Sound Stage Lunch & Learn Discussion

DVS wrapped up a busy year of monthly “Lunch & Learn” online discussions on December 6 by co-hosting a discussion with the New Mexico Film Office (NMFO) about *Operation Sound Stage*.”

These monthly discussions provide an opportunity for veterans service and community service organizations to share information with the state’s veteran community about how their programs can help New Mexico’s veterans and their families.

Operation Sound Stage seeks qualified veterans to fill behind-the-scenes jobs in the state’s booming film and TV production industry. It is a workforce development initiative through the NMFO’s Film Crew Advancement Program that also provides a fast track to film industry union membership--offering waived initiation fees and requirement hours for industry technical unions IATSE Local 480 and Teamsters 492.

“TV and movie production companies have reached out to the film office seeking qualified veterans to fill jobs,” said DVS Cabinet Secretary Sonya Smith. “They like the discipline and work ethic that veterans have learned through their military service, so we are happy to help get the word out—and get these jobs filled with veterans.”

DVS Wraps Up Busy Fall Schedule of Outreach Visits

DVS wrapped up a busy fall outreach schedule in December with visits to the Genoveva Chavez Community Center in Santa Fe (*right photo*) and other communities around the state that do not have a DVS field office.

The outreaches gave an opportunity for veterans who prefer to get benefits filing assistance in-person rather than through email, phone calls, or regular mail. DVS had resumed making outreach visits earlier in the fall after having stopped all travel and public gatherings since last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



At the Santa Fe outreach (*left photo, in black shirt*), DVS Veterans Service Officer Nick McKenzie provided the in-person assistance. He was joined by representatives from the Santa Fe National Cemetery, the New Mexico VA Health Care System, the Albuquerque VA Regional Office, the New Mexico Rail Runner, and the Santa Fe Vet Center.

More outreaches throughout the state were scheduled to resume in January, 2022. For all outreach visits, veterans and DVS staff are required to wear safety masks in accordance with ongoing COVID-19 safety protocols.

December (continued)

“Operation Holiday Cheer” Inundates the State Veterans Home With Holiday Season Cards

More than 7,000 holiday season cards were to the New Mexico State Veterans Home in Truth or Consequences as the result of *Operation Holiday Cheer* launched by DVS in early December.

The 2nd annual event asked New Mexicans to send the cards as a way of sending some holiday cheer to the residents and staff of New Mexico’s only state veterans home. Many residents have limited contact with family—or do not have any family at all; many staff work during the holidays, providing round-the-clock 24/7/365 care for residents.



People were asked to address the cards with “Dear Veteran” or “Dear Hero”—and to also include a message of appreciation for their military service. Cards sent to staff were asked to be addressed with “Dear Frontline Hero” and to also include a message of thanks. All cards sent to the home were evenly distributed to residents and staff. The Santa Fe 4H club (*above and left photos*) and other community and veterans groups gathered cards as part of the effort and delivered them to the home.

“Wreaths Across America” Commemorated at the Angel Fire, Fort Stanton, and Gallup State Veterans Cemeteries

Holiday wreaths were placed at gravesites at the DVS-managed Angel Fire, Fort Stanton, and Gallup State Veterans Cemeteries on December 18 as part of the nationwide *Wreaths Across America* day.

The annual event is a coordinated nationwide effort to place holiday wreaths at selected gravesites at cemeteries across the country at noon Eastern Standard Time—to coincide with the noon wreath laying ceremony at the Arlington National Cemetery outside of Washington, D.C. The wreaths are purchased, through a Maine-based company, by anyone wishing to honor fallen veterans over the holiday season. Volunteers and cemetery staff place the wreaths on the gravesites.



Here in New Mexico, in addition to the three DVS-managed state cemeteries, wreaths were placed at the Santa Fe and Fort Bayard National Cemeteries, and many public cemeteries throughout the state.

New Mexico's Veteran Population

The Numbers

New Mexico's Veteran Population (by County)

<u>Rank</u>	<u>County</u>	
1	Bernalillo	48,743
2	Dona Ana	14,399
3	Sandoval	12,028
4	Santa Fe	9,947
5	Otero	7,905
6	San Juan	7,931
7	Valencia	6,094
8	Curry	4,762
9	Eddy	3,525
10	Chaves	3,478
11	McKinley	2,904
12	Grant	2,596
13	Rio Arriba	2,446
14	Taos	2,287
15	Lea	2,144
16	San Miguel	1,983
17	Lincoln	1,922
18	Cibola	1,742
19	Luna	1,499
20	Sierra	1,459
21	Los Alamos	1,320
22	Torrance	1,293
23	Roosevelt	1,200
24	Socorro	1,156
25	Colfax	1,089
26	Quay	640
27	Catron	368
28	Guadalupe	346
29	Mora	329
30	Union	325
31	Hidalgo	276
32	De Baca	187
<u>33</u>	<u>Harding</u>	<u>57</u>
	TOTAL	148,377

New Mexico's Veteran Population

Population of the United States of America **332,438,400**

(Source: U.S. Census "World Clock" as of January 1, 2022)

National Veteran Population **19,162,515**

(Source: U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs projection as of Sep. 30, 2021)

National Veteran Percentage of Population **5.7%**

Population of New Mexico **2,115,877**

(Source: U.S. Census/July, 2021)

New Mexico's Veteran Population **148,377**

New Mexico's Veteran Percentage of Population **7%**

Five Largest Veteran-Populated Counties in New Mexico

Bernalillo	48,743
Doña Ana	14,399
Sandoval	12,028
Santa Fe	9,947
Otero	7,905
Total	93,022

63% of New Mexico's veterans live in these five counties

Albuquerque Metro Area Veteran Population

Bernalillo	48,743
Sandoval	12,028
Santa Fe	9,947
Valencia	6,094
Total:	76,812

52% of New Mexico's veterans live in the four-county Albuquerque metro area

Wartime Veterans	125,098
Peacetime Veterans	27,839
Pre-WWI, WWI	0
Between WWI-WWII	9
WWII Era Veterans	2,309
WWII only	2,152
WWII & Korea	70
WWII, Korea, & Vietnam	86
Between WWII & Korean War Era	103
Korean War Era Veterans	6,428
(WWII & Korea)	(70)
(WWII, Korea, & Vietnam)	(86)
Korea Only	5,318
Korea & Vietnam	953
Between Korean War Era & Vietnam	8,075
Vietnam War Era Veterans	51,510
(WWII, Korea, & Vietnam)	(86)
(Korea & Vietnam)	(953)
Vietnam Only	47,107
Vietnam, & Gulf War	2,745
Vietnam, Gulf War, & Post-9/11	405
Vietnam, Post-9/11	214
Between Vietnam War & Gulf War Eras	19,652
Gulf War Era Veterans	38,901
(Vietnam & Gulf War)	(2,745)
(Vietnam, Gulf War, & Post-9/11)	(405)
Gulf War Only	21,790
Gulf War & Post 9/11	13,961
Post-9/11 Era Veterans	40,316
(Vietnam, Gulf War, & Post-9/11)	(405)
(Vietnam, Post-9/11)	(214)
(Gulf War & Post 9/11)	(13,961)
Post-9/11 Only	25,736

Age Breakdown of New Mexico's Veterans

<u>Age</u>	<u>Total</u>
18-19	60
<u>20-29</u>	<u>6,206</u>
20-24	1,800
25-29	4,406
<u>30-39</u>	<u>13,757</u>
30-34	6,275
35-39	7,482
<u>40-49</u>	<u>16,988</u>
40-44	8,590
45-49	8,398
<u>50-59</u>	<u>24,364</u>
50-54	11,272
55-59	13,092
<u>60-69</u>	<u>30,404</u>
60-64	15,121
65-69	15,283
<u>70-79</u>	<u>36,834</u>
70-74	19,235
75-79	17,599
80-84	8,374
85+	11,390
TOTAL	148,377

Racial Makeup of New Mexico's Veteran Population

<u>Race</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>% of Vet Population</u>
White	81,665	55%
Hispanic	46,677	31%
Native American	9,757	6%
African American	7,386	5%
Asian	1,205	<1%
Other	1,687	<1%
TOTAL	148,377	



New Mexico's Women Veteran Population

Number of U.S. Veterans	19,162,515
Number of Women Veterans in the USA:	2,045,384
Percentage of the USA's Veterans That Are Women:	10.7%

Number of Veterans in New Mexico:	148,377
Number of Women Veterans in New Mexico:	16,676
Percentage of New Mexico's Veterans That Are Women:	11%

Age Breakdown of New Mexico's Women Veterans

<u>Age Group</u>	<u>Number</u>
18-19	17
20-29	1,224
30-39	2,610
40-49	3,042
50-59	3,520
60-69	4,105
70-79	1,433
80+	726