



The Guardian

The Newsletter of the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services

www.nmdvs.org

1-(866) 433-8387 toll-free

February, 2020

90-Year Old Former POW Guest Speaker Highlights Military & Veterans Day at the Legislature



Former Korean War U.S. Army Private 1st Class and ex-Prisoner of War (POW) Manuel Martinez (*left and below photos*) was the featured speaker on *Military & Veterans Day at the Legislature* at the State Capitol in Santa Fe on January 25.

His appearance capped the annual day during the legislature presented by the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services (DVS) and the New Mexico Department of Military Affairs to honor the service and sacrifice of New Mexico's active-duty military personnel and military veterans.

Every year, a particular segment of the military is featured at a noon ceremony in the Rotunda. The focus at this year's ceremony was on POW's and those still listed as Missing in Action (MIA). PFC Martinez, from the small northern New Mexico town of Truchas, was a Machine Gunner in the Army's 3rd Division. He was taken prisoner by North Korean forces on September 27, 1952, when his unit came under heavy fire.

"By the grace of God, I escaped serious injury—except for a few shrapnel wounds," said Mr. Martinez in his remarks at the ceremony. "My assistant gunner was seriously wounded. While I was tending to his wounds, I was taken captive."

Mr. Martinez, a longtime resident of Pojoaque, was among seven soldiers of his unit taken prisoner on that day. He mentioned the poor conditions—being fed meager rations of boiled vegetation...and Maize—which, because of his rural upbringing in northern New Mexico, he recognized as cattle feed.

"I was told by other prisoners in the camp that those captured before us suffered much more inhumane conditions," he recounted. "Some were brutally murdered without cause. Many starved to death. Many died from lack of medical care; others, from exposure to the extreme cold. But conditions gradually improved. We were given rice for the first time... and were being fed twice a day."

Mr. Martinez spent eleven months in captivity—being liberated a month after North and South Korea signed an Armistice on July 27, 1953, to cease hostilities between the two countries. He spent nearly three months recovering and rehabbing at Fitzsimons Army Medical Center in Denver before returning home to northern New Mexico, where he opened a hardware store in Pojoaque.

"This has been an honor for me," he said at the conclusion of his remarks. "It is not easy for many of us to re-live the memories. I lost two friends who took their own lives after the war—one of them I met in the prison camp; the other one, after the war. But I moved on, and am very thankful for what I have today."





LEFT PHOTO: DVS State Approving Agency Bureau Chief Marilyn "Mandy" Dykman (*behind podium*) sang the National Anthem shortly after a New Mexico Army & Air National Guard Color Guard presented The Colors. DVS Secretary Judy Griego and New Mexico Adjutant General/Maj. Gen. Ken Nava are standing at attention to the right of the podium)

RIGHT PHOTO: Recognized at the ceremony were former POW's Aubrey Nichols (*left, in dark coat*) and Ralph Nelson (*right, in maroon vest*).

80-year old Aubrey Nichols was a Navy Lt. Cmdr. who was shot down while flying his A-7 Corsair on a combat mission over North Korea on May 19, 1972. He was released from the Hoa Lo Prison (the "Hanoi Hilton") eleven months later. After recuperating, he returned to active duty...retiring from the Defense Nuclear Agency Field Command at Kirtland AFB in 1988.



94-year old Ralph Nelson was a WWII Army infantryman who was among several in his unit who were captured during the Battle of the Bulge in December of 1944. He was released shortly after Germany formally surrendered to Allied forces on May 8, 1945. After his recuperation & rehabilitation, Mr. Nelson eventually became a long-time dentist in Los Alamos.



LEFT PHOTO: Also recognized were four members of the American Gold Star Mothers (AGSM)-Department of New Mexico (*from L to R*): Former AGSM National President & former AGSM-Dept. of New Mexico President Becky Christmas, former AGSM-Dept. of New Mexico President Jo Ann Zembiec, current AGSM-Dept. of New Mexico President Pat Merville, and former AGSM-Dept. of New Mexico President Kay Coleman.

RIGHT PHOTO: DVS Secretary Griego (*at podium*) implored New Mexicans to never forget our American service members still listed as Missing in Action.

"Though America is thankful there are no U.S. troops currently in captivity, there are still nearly 82,000 Americans who remain missing from previous wars," she said in her remarks preceding the address by Mr. Martinez. "It pains me to think there are tens of thousands of families still grieving for long-lost family members from as far back as World War I. America must continue to locate and identify the remains of our long-lost missing, and bring them home to their final resting place."



LEFT PHOTO: New Mexico Adjutant General/Maj. Gen. Ken Nava (*right photo*) read the names of 12 Vietnam War veterans who are New Mexico's most recent MIA's:

USMC Staff Sgt. Stan Corfield, Army E7 Ricardo Davis, Army Sgt. 1st Class Frederick Herrera, USAF O2 Mitchell Lane, Army Maj. Calvin Maxwell, USAF Lt. Col. Scott McIntire, USAF Lt. Col. Robert Morrissey, USAF Col. Bobby Neeld, USMC Maj. John Oldham, Army Pfc. Max Simpson, Army Sgt. 1st Class Robert Trujillo, and Army WO1 Bain Wiseman.



RIGHT PHOTO: New Mexico Air National Guard Master Sgt. Jessica Lamb lights a candle at the symbolic POW/MIA Table. New Mexico Army National Guard Lt. Col. Beau Romero, the Master of Ceremonies, recited the following:

As you entered the rotunda today, you may have noticed a small table in a place of honor. It is set for one. This table is our way of symbolizing the fact that members of our profession of arms are missing from our midst. They are commonly called POWs or MIAs. We call them comrades. They are unable to be with their loved ones and families today, so we join together to pay our humble tribute to them, and bear witness to their continued absence.



This table set for one is small--symbolizing the frailty of one prisoner alone against his or her suppressors. The tablecloth is white--symbolizing the purity of their intentions to respond to their country's call to arms. The single red rose displayed in a vase reminds us of the families and loved ones of our comrades-in-arms who keep the faith awaiting their return.

The yellow ribbon tied so prominently on the vase is reminiscent of the yellow ribbon worn upon the lapel and breasts of thousands who bear witness to their unyielding determination to demand a proper accounting of our missing. A slice of lemon is on the bread plate to remind us of their bitter fate. There is salt upon the bread plate--symbolic of the families' tears as they wait. The glass is inverted. They cannot toast with us this afternoon. The chair. The chair is empty. They are not here. The candle...is reminiscent of the light of hope which lives in our hearts to illuminate their way home, away from their captors, to the open arms of a grateful nation.

Let us remember and never forget their sacrifices.

DVS Promotes Veterans Service Officer to State Benefits Bureau Chief

DVS has promoted Santa Fe-based Veterans Service Officer (VSO) Jeff George to fill its vacant State Benefits Bureau Chief position.

Mr. George, a former Army M1A1 Tank crew member, has been with DVS since March of 2008. In his new position, he will manage the agency's bureau that oversees the many state veterans' benefits available to New Mexico's veterans...such as the \$4,000 veterans state property tax exemption off the total valuation of a primary residence, and disabled veteran Game & Fish licenses—the two most filed-for state veteran's benefits with DVS .

He will report directly to State Benefits Division Director Ed Mendez.

In his previous VSO position with the agency Mr. George assisted veterans and widows of veterans with filing for their federal VA and state veterans' benefits (*below photos*). This often-complicated process, if done incorrectly by self-filing veterans, could result in long wait-times to receive the benefit, receiving a less-than-optimal amount of the benefit, or a denial based on incorrect or incomplete information.



Jeff George
DVS Benefits Bureau Chief

The decision to promote from within to fill the vacant bureau chief position was an easy one, said DVS Secretary Judy Griego.

"There were several outstanding candidates for the vacancy, but it was clearly evident that Jeff was the right person for the job," said Secretary Griego. "He has an outstanding knowledge of veterans benefits, and a strong commitment to helping veterans file for their benefits. I'm confident Jeff will help make the DVS Benefits Bureau even stronger."

One of his main functions will be to help identify future state veterans' benefits, and work with Director Mendez and Secretary Griego to develop legislation for passage into state law. He will also work with the Field Services Division to coordinate state veterans' benefits outreach efforts, and look for additional ways to improve overall efforts to better serve New Mexico's 154,172 veterans.

A search is underway to fill the DVS Santa Fe VSO vacancy.



DVS, Bernalillo County Hosts First Veterans State Property Tax Exemption Outreach of 2020



DVS and the Bernalillo County Assessor's Office hosted a Veterans Benefits Outreach on December 16 at the assessor's office in downtown Albuquerque—a continuation of a third annual outreach collaborative outreach launched by the two agencies in December.

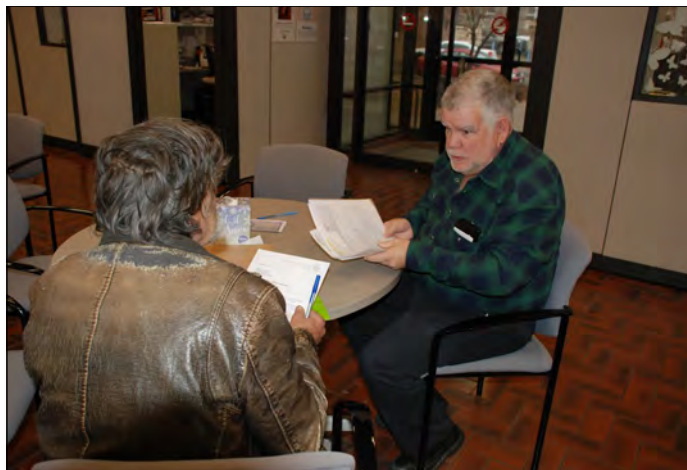
DVS Albuquerque-based Veterans Service Officer Gordon Schei (*upper-left photo, in white shirt*) and DVS Event Coordinator Joseph Dorn (*middle photo, in dark shirt*) joined Bernalillo County Assessor Office/Eligibility Specialist Carmen Gonzales (*lower-left photo*) to assist veterans with filing for the Veterans State Property Tax Exemption—a \$4,000 reduction in the taxable value of a veteran's primary residence. This benefit is also available

to un-remarried widows of veterans who would have otherwise qualified for this benefit.

Veterans rated at 100% service-connected disabled were able to have their total property tax liability waived.

A new feature for this joint collaboration is the ability for veterans to receive their Property Tax Exemption Certificate from Mr. Schei on the spot—allowing them to forego having to return to DVS to pick up the completed certificate., or wait for it to be mailed to them in 2-4 weeks.

“The purpose of these collaborative outreach events is to streamline the veterans property tax exemption process,” said Bernalillo County Assessor Tanya R. Giddings. “By having DVS on site, a veteran can also come meet with a representative and learn about other state and federal benefits and resources available to them.”



This joint effort continues through the spring, with outreach stops at the Bernalillo County Assessor's Office on February 20, March 19, April 16, and concluding on April 23.

No appointment is necessary. Veterans must bring a copy of their DD-214 separation papers or any documents from the VA as proof of veteran status in order to receive the veterans' property tax exemption certificate, or to help expedite any on-site filing veterans' benefits processes.

Veterans can also file for lost DD-214's.



Veterans anywhere in the state can also simply contact their nearest DVS field office listed on the back two pages of this newsletter to file for their the veterans' property tax exemption—or their VA or state veterans' benefits.

DVS Gives First Quarterly Briefing of the Year

DVS presented its first quarterly briefing of 2020 on January 22 at the New Mexico Veterans Memorial in Albuquerque.

These briefings provide an opportunity for DVS, the New Mexico VA Health Care System, the Albuquerque VA Regional Office, and selected veterans service agencies or community partner organizations to talk about ongoing or planned activities.



DVS Deputy Secretary Bryan Osterhage moderated the briefing in place of Secretary Judy Griego—who was called to a Cabinet briefing with Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham. He began the proceedings with a presentation of the New Mexico Medal of Merit, on behalf of the Governor, for meritorious achievement in helping veterans, to Joe Baca (*left photo*), the Congressional Liaison to New Mexico VA Health Care System (NMVAHCS) Director Andrew Welch; and to Mitchell Lawrence (*below photo*), the former DVS Health Care Division Director now working with the NMVAHCS.

The certificates, in part, recognized the two for their work with DVS, and their "...professionalism and dedication to New Mexico's veterans, which has been a positive influence in the lives of countless veterans. Mr. Baca/Mr. Lawrence has exhibited outstanding leadership, dedication, and selfless service...which reflects great credit upon himself and the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services."



The New Mexico VA Health Care Center (NMVAHCS)

NMVAHCS Director Welch then gave an update from the Albuquerque Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center. He began with a report on the Fisher House, which opened last October to provide free lodging for families of veterans undergoing inpatient care at the medical center and who live outside of the Albuquerque metro area.

He thanked the many agencies—including DVS—for supporting the Fisher House Foundation's effort to build the facility on the VAMC campus.

"It is a beautiful facility. What we have is comparable to any 5-star hotel in the state," said Director Welch. "Ten of the 16 suites are now occupied, and we anticipate regular full occupancy as word of this fantastic facility spreads throughout New Mexico."

Director Welch also re-emphasized the NMVAHCS commitment to tackling the problem of veteran suicide, which he said is the top priority of the VA nationwide. He cited the latest VA data which shows an average of 20 veterans a day take their own lives. Of these 20, Director Welch said 14 are not VA patients; of the remaining six, three skip their regular treatment.

(continued)

"If anyone says suicide prevention is not treatable—they are wrong," he said. "We know that once we get hold of them, their chances of success are very high, because our programs work. But we need your help in finding these veterans who need help."

Director Welch concluded his update with a reminder that, as of January 1, the VA has now begun reviewing claims by Vietnam War "Blue Water Navy Veterans" for Agent Orange-related health problems. He urged these Vietnam War Navy veterans to submit claims if they haven't done so, or to refile a claim which was previously denied.

NM National Guard

New Mexico Army National Guard Maj. Randall Bates followed with an update from the New Mexico National Guard (NMNG). He spoke on behalf of New Mexico Adjutant General Ken Nava, who like DVS Secretary Griego was also in Santa Fe for the 2020 Legislature.



Maj. Bates supported NMVAHCS Director Welch's commitment to dealing with veteran suicide--pointing out that all NMNG personnel must take a mandatory 1-1/2 hour suicide prevention class, and that the NMNG offers an additional two-day optional class.

"These are something that we really push out," said Maj. Bates. "The New Mexico National Guard strongly believes that one loss of life...is one too many."

He then gave an update on troop deployments:

- Nearly 400 NMNG soldiers of the NMNG's 1st Battalion/200th Infantry are now in the Horn of Africa region in support of ongoing U.S. operations countering piracy and other militant activity.
- A medical unit of 65 soldiers of the 1209th Medical Support Company is in Poland in support of Operation Atlantic Resolve, which monitors tensions between Russia and Ukraine.
 - Maj. Bates reported that Maj. Gen. Nava and NMANG State Command Chief Mitchell Brush recently returned from visiting the troops in both regions.
- A five-man unit will be heading to Kuwait this fall in support of ongoing U.S. transportation operations in that region; with another unit deploying to Kuwait this fall.

Maj. Bates concluded his briefing with a report on the New Mexico National Guard's Emergency Relief Fund...which was created two years ago through legislative action to create a source for emergency funds for Guard members who encounter difficulties paying for rent/mortgage, utilities, home repairs, and other financial hardship cases.

The Fund was initially allotted \$160,000. To date, \$73,000 has been utilized by 36 Guard members:

- \$27,000 in rent/mortgage assistance
- \$8,000 home repairs
- \$3,000 utility bills

With the recent and future planned troop deployments, Maj. Bates said the families of these deployed Guard personnel may be at risk for financial difficulties. He asked those in attendance to spread the word about this fund—and how people can contribute to the fund:

- Designating all or part of a state income tax refund on the tax forms
 - And the need to fill out a Personal Income Tax Form "D"
- Making direct donations to the fund.

(continued)

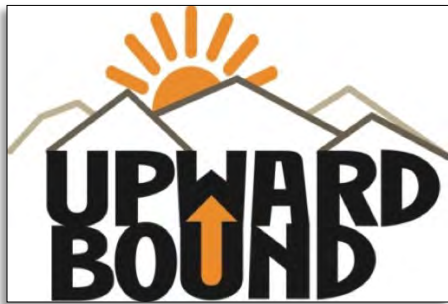
Central New Mexico Community College (CNM) Veterans Resource Center

CNM Veterans Resource Center (VRC) Coordinator Matthew Fuentes gave a presentation about the VRC and its role as a great source of information and assistance for veterans enrolled at the college.



The VRC, he said, provides a welcoming environment which can help veterans with everything from academic counseling, GI Bill® issues, tutoring, career counseling, help with applying for four-year or even Master's degrees, applying for additional financial aid, housing and transportation assistance. He also said the VRC also offers a place for veterans to just "hang out" before/between/after classes...with fellow student-veterans.

According to Mr. Fuentes, 1,036 veterans are using their GI Bill® at five CNM campuses and five additional affiliated locations. He also said later this year—for the first time—CNM will hold a separate "Veterans Graduation" ceremony apart from the "general" graduation ceremony. The location, date, and time will be revealed in the coming months. For more information, please contact Matthew Fuentes at mfuentes6@cnm.edu or (505) 224-4000 x53937.



UNM-Taos Upward Bound Program

Following Mr. Fuentes was a brief presentation from Leonard Shephard, the Outreach Coordinator for the UNM-Taos Upward Bound Program. The federally-funded program is the only veterans federal TRiO program funded by the U.S. Department of Education in New Mexico for veterans who want to use their GI Bill® to attend a college or university—but may need a "refresher" course or "jump start" before applying.

Though affiliated with UNM-Taos...and housed at the CNM VRC...the program can help veterans who want to attend any college or university in the state. Applicants must have been deployed on active-duty for 181 days or more, discharged at other than dishonorable, be from a low-income family, a "first-generation" college student (parents do not have college degrees), and show a need for academic support to successfully pursue a post-secondary education. For more information, please contact Mr. Shephard at or (575) 357-3725 or Lshephard1@unm-edu.

The New Mexico Veterans Business Center (VBOC)

New Mexico Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC) Director Rich Coffel gave a brief presentation about an upcoming Military and Veteran Entrepreneur Summit on March 18 in Las Cruces at the city's convention center.

The summit, which is free, is geared for entrepreneurial-minded veterans and military personnel—especially those in rural areas. Attendees will get valuable tips on how to create, start, and grow a business. Top national executives from the U.S. Small Business Administration, who were impressed at the scope and turnout of last fall's VBOC-sponsored Southwest Veterans Business Conference in Albuquerque, are scheduled to attend and will offer further insights into veterans and small business ownership.

More information on the Summit can be found on page 13; or by contacting VBOC Director Coffel at richardL.coffel@state.nm.us or (505) 383-2401.



The Guardian/DVS Newsletter

The January 22 briefing concluded with a short presentation by DVS Public Information Officer Ray Seva about *The Guardian*—the DVS monthly newsletter.

In addition to covering DVS-sponsored events, Mr. Seva reiterated the agency's desire to also help promote veteran-related events from veterans' service or community service agencies.

"We are glad to function as a 'Town Crier' of veterans' events. We will gladly help you get the word out about your veteran-related events," said Mr. Seva. "But you must let us know well enough in advance, in order for me to put it in the newsletter early enough in advance of your event."

There are certain conditions which must be met, however.

- Agencies/organizations must be a non-profit agency.
- Agencies/organizations must send a flyer
 - No news releases, E-mails, or phone messages.
- Flyers must have all of the important information about the event
 - Date, city, venue, time
- Flyers must have a person listed as a point-of-contact
 - along with his/her phone number and e-mail
- Events must not be political in nature
- DVS will not be responsible for the accuracy of the information in the flyer

Flyers can be sent/questions directed to DVS PIO and Editor of *The Guardian* Ray Seva at (505) 827-6352 or ray.seva@state.nm.us.

Albuquerque VA Regional Office, NM VA Health Care System to Host Benefits "Open House"

The Albuquerque Regional Office and Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center will host a VA Open House and claims assistance event at the New Mexico Veterans Memorial located at 1100 Louisiana Blvd. SE in Albuquerque on Saturday, February 22 from 10am-noon.

The free event includes a Veteran forum with, on-site enrollment for VA healthcare, information on VA services, and on-site claims assistance from the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and Veterans Health Administration (VHA).

VA Leadership will be available to discuss Veterans Benefits Administration services including appeals modernization, Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment services provided for Veterans at the Albuquerque Regional Office. An update on "Blue Water" Vietnam Veterans is also on the agenda. The VBA/VHA staff will be available to help attendees with VA claims questions, health care related eligibility and enrollment questions.



Veterans Service Organization partners are invited to build partnerships to grow the number of individuals and organizations serving Veterans in the area. The Albuquerque Regional Office is renewing its commitment to Veterans by inviting the community to visit and explore opportunities to serve Veterans during this event. "We are fortunate to have many community partners collaborating with VA to help care for our Veterans. As a commitment to honoring America's Veterans, we are asking people to get involved in services to our Veterans," said Sammie Quillin, Director of the Albuquerque Regional Office.

The event will also serve to host congressional members and staff to provide education on the VA benefits available.

Veterans & Community Service Organizations— Upcoming Events

As a public service to New Mexico's veteran community, DVS/*The Guardian* will gladly publish flyers providing advance notice of an event hosted by a non-profit veteran or community service organization.

Events must be veteran-related or beneficial to veterans and their dependents.

Submitted information must be in the form of a flyer—no news releases or email “text” copy. Flyers must show either a website...or a point-of-contact and his/her phone number or email address. DVS will not be responsible for disseminating details about these non-DVS events.

In including an event in *The Guardian*, DVS will not be responsible for the accuracy or content of information contained on the provided flyers. The veracity of information in submitted flyers is the responsibility of the non-profit agency or organization sending the flyer. Furthermore, inclusion in *The Guardian* will not serve as an endorsement by DVS of the parties or their products and services.

DVS reserves the right to decline any submitted flyers. Furthermore, as a state agency, DVS cannot accept event flyers promoting activities presented or hosted by “for-profit” entities.

To the maximum extent permitted by applicable law, DVS expressly denies liability for injuries or losses suffered by any person or organization--either directly or indirectly-- relating to events, services, or information listed on flyers submitted to DVS.

Please submit your flyers (in jpeg or pdf form) to DVS Public Information Officer/*The Guardian* Editor Ray Seva at ray.seva@state.nm.us.

Please submit these flyers well in advance of an event's date. (*The Guardian* is typically e-mailed statewide the first week of each month)

McKinley County Veteran Services Collaborative Presents:



VETERANS RESOURCE FAIR

WEDNESDAY
FEBRUARY 19
10:00AM - 2:00PM

UNM GALLUP
GURLEY HALL
GALLUP, NM



VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
New Mexico VA Health Care System



**Education * Healthcare * Benefits * VSO's * Jobs
ALL ARE WELCOME TO ATTEND**

Please bring your DD-214

For more information call 505-274-1747

35th Annual

TRIBUTE TO WOMEN IN THE MILITARY



Reproduced with permission. All rights reserved. Stamp design © 1999 U.S. Postal Service.

*“Celebrating & Honoring Military Women in all Branches of Service”
~Past, Present and Future~*

As follows:

ARMY at our 2016 Event - MARINES at our 2017 Event - NAVY at our 2018 Event
AIR FORCE at our 2019 Event - COAST GUARD at our 2020 Event

Friday, 6 March 2020

At

American Legion Post 49

11005 Central Ave NE • Albuquerque, New Mexico

0800 hrs - Registration Opens, Exhibits, Refreshments,
Networking

0900 hrs - Opening Ceremonies

0930 hrs - Morning Entertainment

1130 hrs - Luncheon

Keynote Speaker

MARILYN M. DYKMAN, LCDR, USCG Ret.
Bureau Chief, NM State Approving Agency
For Veteran's Education and Training

Tribute XXXV President: Diana Wong, USAF (575) 640-3042
Registration Info: Ms. Ethel Tilley (505) 853-1718

**Registration Required
by Feb. 21**

www.TributeToWomenInTheMilitary.org



U.S. Small Business
Administration

SAVE THE DATE

Military and Veteran Entrepreneur Summit

Wednesday, March 18, 2020 | 8 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Are you a service member, veteran, National Guard or Reserve member, or military spouse interested in starting or growing your own small business?

Join our upcoming summit to hear small business tips from successful military and veteran entrepreneurs and learn about the local and national SBA resources that are available to you.

- Attend breakout sessions on access to capital, government contracting, and more
- Tap into rural business resources and network with military and veteran entrepreneurs
- Meet Eli Crane, former Navy SEAL and owner of Bottle Breacher (as seen on *Shark Tank!*)

LOCAL SMALL
BUSINESS
RESOURCES

RURAL BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT

ACCESS TO
CAPITAL

GOVERNMENT
CONTRACTING

Explore the possibilities. Register today!

**FREE EVENT - REGISTER HERE BY MARCH 11:
[SBAMilitarySummit.eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/sbamilitarysummit)**

Las Cruces Convention Center • 680 E University Ave • Las Cruces, New Mexico 88001

Summit agenda is subject to change. Reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities will be made if requested at least two weeks prior to the event. Contact Merico (Rico) Zanotti, Merico.Zanotti@sba.gov.

VA Releases Updated DOD List Identifying Agent Orange Sites Outside of Vietnam



*VA Secretary
Robert Wilkie*

**For more news and
benefits information
from the VA, visit
www.va.gov**

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

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released in January an updated Department of Defense (DOD) list of locations outside of Vietnam—including several locations here in the U.S.: www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/locations/tests-storage/outside-vietnam.asp where tactical herbicides were used, tested or stored by the United States military.

“This update was necessary to improve accuracy and communication of information,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “VA depends on DOD to provide information regarding in-service environmental exposure for disability claims based on exposure to herbicides outside of Vietnam.”

DOD conducted a thorough review of research, reports and government publications in response to a November 2018 Government Accountability Office report: <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/695490.pdf>

“DOD will continue to be responsive to the needs of our interagency partners in all matters related to taking care of both current and former service members,” said Defense Secretary Mark T. Esper. “The updated list includes Agents Orange, Pink, Green, Purple, Blue and White and other chemicals and will be updated as verifiable information becomes available.”

Veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange or other herbicides during service may be eligible for a variety of VA benefits, including an Agent Orange Registry health exam, (<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/benefits/registry-exam.asp>), health care, and disability compensation for diseases associated with exposure. Their dependents and

What is Agent Orange?

(definition courtesy of the VA)

Agent Orange was a tactical herbicide used by the U.S. military from 1962 to 1975, named for the orange band around the storage barrel. The military sprayed millions of gallons of Agent Orange and other tactical herbicides on trees and vegetation during the Vietnam War. Several decades later, concerns about the health effects from these chemicals, including dioxin, a byproduct of Agent Orange production, continue.

The VA offers eligible veterans a free Agent Orange Registry health exam (<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/benefits/registry-exam.asp>) for possible long-term health problems related to exposure. The VA also offers health care, disability compensation, and other benefits to eligible veterans for certain disease conditions, as well as benefits for children of Vietnam veterans who have Spina Bifida. Dependents and survivors may also be eligible for other benefits.

VA Makes it Easier to Use the VA Home Loan Benefit

On Jan. 1, 2020, it became easier for veterans use their VA home loan benefit to purchase, refinance, or construct a home with no down payment, regardless of the cost of the home.

The VA home county loan limits were eliminated as part of the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 for veterans and service members with full entitlement. Historically, the VA only guaranteed home loans up to the county conforming loan limits (CLL) as determined by the Federal Housing Finance Agency. These loan limits reflect the changes in average U.S. home prices at the county level.

If you chose to purchase, refinance, or construct a home above the CLL, the lender would likely require a down payment from you before they would choose to close on the loan. In counties such as San Diego, Calif., or Arlington, Va., the limit is much higher to reflect the average cost of a home. This meant that when using your VA benefit, the lender—not the VA—would require you to pay up to a 25% down payment on any amount above the county limit.

As of January 1, first-time homebuyers, or homebuyers who have sold their home and have full benefit entitlement available, will no longer have to worry about loan limits or down payment requirements when purchasing, refinancing, or constructing a new home. Conforming loan limits will impact those who want to purchase a second (or subsequent) home using a VA home loan. For those that currently have a VA home loan and plan to keep it and purchase a new home using a VA-backed loan that is more than \$144,000, the rules are different.

- You must be able to afford all the loans at the time of closing.
- The next home you purchase must be your primary residence.

The VA may be able to back the next loan, but it will depend on your *remaining entitlement* and the conforming loan limit (CLL) for your county.

Your basic VA home loan entitlement starts at \$36,000 and goes up to 25% of the loan amount. The amount remaining on your entitlement after purchasing your first home will impact how much of a down payment will be required for your next purchase.

If the county CLL is \$500,000 and your last loan was for \$500,000, then you have no entitlement remaining. If your first loan was for \$200,000 and the second is for \$400,000, the CLL for your next home would need to be at least \$600,000 if you want the no-down payment option, otherwise you'll have to pay a down payment on the amount above the CLL. Note that the county that will determine your loan limit is the county in which your next home is located.

As each case is different, your first step should be to request your certificate of eligibility (https://www.benefits.va.gov/homeloans/purchaseco_certificate.asp), which will show your remaining VA home loan entitlement. If you need assistance determining what this means for you, reach out to your lender or a VA loan specialist.

As with any home loan decision, you should speak with your lender(s) or a loan specialist at your VA Regional Loan Center (https://www.benefits.va.gov/homeloans/contact_rlc_info.asp) to go over your options when purchasing your next home. Only you can determine what is best for your personal and financial needs. Whatever the case, speaking to a loan professional about your options and shopping around for the best situation for you is key.

Remember, the VA Home Loan Program staff is here to assist you. For more information on VA home loans go to: www.benefits.va.gov/homeloans.

Applications Open for Community Organizations to Apply for Adaptive Sports Grants for Disabled Veterans

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is accepting applications through March 17 for up to \$15 million in grants for civic groups providing adaptive sports and therapeutic recreational opportunities for veterans and members of the armed forces with disabilities.

Application instructions and eligibility information for these grants — which will help qualified organizations plan, develop, manage and implement these programs — are available at <https://www.blogs.va.gov/nvspse/grant-program>.

“Built on VA clinical expertise and operations, with essential support from community partners, the adaptive sports grant program allows the VA to extend its level of care beyond the clinical setting,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “We are pleased to offer grant funds to community organizations, as it means there will be more veterans engaging in the challenge of sports and more Veterans who are exposed to new skills for healthier living.”

In 2019, the VA awarded \$14.9 million in adaptive sports grants to 126 organizations, estimated to serve more than 11,000 Veterans and service members from every state, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Of the total awarded, \$1.5 million is being used to assist organizations that offer equine-assisted therapy to support mental health. All applications must be submitted to www.grants.gov by 8pm EST on March 17. The VA will announce awards based on a competitive selection in fall 2020.

VA Launches Diabetes Education Campaign

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has launched a new campaign to give veterans a better understanding of their diabetes numbers, which are critical to their well-being. The *Understand Your Diabetes Numbers* campaign educates veterans and their families on hemoglobin A1C, glucose meter, blood pressure and kidney tests, and other vital measurements.

“One in four veterans enrolled in VA health care services has diabetes,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “This public health campaign encourages veterans to be proactive with their health care teams by improving their understanding of diabetes test results. The campaign reflects VA’s ongoing commitment to improve the health care experiences of Veterans by empowering them to be active partners in their care.”

The [VA’s Office of Patient Care Services](#) is overseeing the year-long campaign--which addresses treatment goals, medication and nutritional management, and patient safety. Key topics include understanding the importance of hemoglobin A1c test results, shared decision making between veterans and their health care team, [hypoglycemia safety](#), insulin differences, good nutrition and carbohydrate counting, and kidney function and blood pressure measurement. [Hemoglobin A1c \(HbA1c\)](#) is a marker, along with blood pressure and cholesterol control, of good diabetes care.

VA’s diabetes campaign is guided by Choosing Wisely® which is a collective effort among professional societies whose goal is to reduce medical tests, treatments and procedures that may be unnecessary. For more information, watch the VA roundtable videos *Diabetes is a Disease of Numbers*: (https://players.brightcove.net/2851863979001/default_default/index.html?videoId=6097456567001)...and *Healthcare Teams Helping Veterans Understand Diabetes Numbers*: (https://players.brightcove.net/2851863979001/default_default/index.html?videoId=6097438426001)

VeteransCount!



Stand Up! Be counted for the 2020 U.S. Census!

Census data is confidential

- Your personal information is protected by law, and is never released to any other local, state, or federal agency (Title 13 of the U.S. Code). Your individual census responses will not affect your tax status or insurance premiums.
- The Census Bureau will never ask for your Social Security number, bank account number, or money of any kind.

Census data affects your community.

- Census data determines federal funding to Medicare, Medicaid, and many other federally-funded programs which greatly assist families.
- The data collected by the U.S. Census will determine your political representation for the next 10-years...at the local, state, and federal levels.
- *VA expenditures and other federally-funded veterans programs are directly affected by the military veteran population of a state.*

Responding to the Census is easy.

- You can respond to the U.S. Census online, over the phone, or wait for the paperwork to be mailed to you.

For more information: www.2020census.gov

in cooperation with the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services

United States[™]
Census
2020

DVS FIELD OFFICES

The New Mexico Department of Veterans Services has thirteen field offices to assist veterans, their eligible dependents with filing for VA and state veterans benefits. Each office is managed by a nationally certified Veterans Service Officer (VSO)—who are also veterans themselves.

Below are the thirteen DVS field offices—and the contact information for each managing VSO—followed on the next page with locations of outreach visits by each VSO. Walk-ins are welcome, but DVS encourages veterans to make an appointment to avoid unnecessary wait-times.

ALAMOGORDO	ALBUQUERQUE #1	ALBUQUERQUE #2
<p>Larry Weatherwax 411 10th Street # 107 (575) 437-4635 larry.weatherwax@state.nm.us</p>	<p>Karen Abeyta 500 Gold Ave. SW (505) 346-3986 karen.abeyta@state.nm.us</p>	<p>Gordon Schei 500 Gold Ave. SW (505) 346-4810 gordon.schei@state.nm.us</p>
ALBUQUERQUE #3	ALBUQUERQUE #4	CARLSBAD
<p>Martín Marquez 5201 Eagle Rock Ave. NE (505) 383-2406 martinM.marquez@state.nm.us</p>	<p>5201 Eagle Rock Ave. NE <i>Temporarily vacant.</i> <i>Please contact Albuquerque #3 for assistance.</i></p>	<p>Dagmar Youngberg 101 N. Halagueno (575) 885-4939 dagmar.youngberg@state.nm.us</p>
CLOVIS	FARMINGTON	GALLUP
<p>Matthew Barela 904 W. 6th Street (575) 762-6185 matthew.barela@state.nm.us</p>	<p>Beverly Charley San Juan College VetCenter Rm.1715B (505) 327-2861 beverly.charley@state.nm.us</p>	<p><i>Temporarily vacant.</i> <i>Please contact the DVS Farmington office for assistance.</i></p>
GRANTS	HOBBS	LAS CRUCES #1
<p>Patrick Aragon 515 West High St./Suite C (505) 287-8387 patrick.aragon@state.nm.us</p>	<p>Dalton Boyd 2120 N. Alto Street (575) 397-5290 dalton.boyd@state.nm.us</p>	<p>George Vargas 2024 E. Griggs Ave. (575) 524-6124 george.vargas@state.nm.us</p>
LAS CRUCES #2	LAS CRUCES #3	LAS VEGAS #1
<p>Rosa Bycenski 2024 E. Griggs Ave. (575) 524-6220 rosa.bycenski@state.nm.us</p>	<p>2024 E. Griggs Ave. <i>Temporarily vacant.</i> <i>Please contact Las Cruces offices 1 & 2 for assistance</i></p>	<p><i>Temporarily vacant.</i> <i>Please call toll-free 1-(866) 433-8387 for assistance</i></p>
LAS VEGAS (NM) #2	ROSWELL	SANTA FE
<p><i>Temporarily vacant.</i> <i>Please call toll-free 1-(866) 433-8387 for assistance</i></p>	<p>Danielle Thompson 1600 SE Main St./Suite A (575) 624-6086 danielle.thompson@state.nm.us</p>	<p><i>Temporarily vacant.</i> <i>Please call toll-free 1-(866) 433-8387 for assistance</i></p>
WOMEN VETERANS PROGRAM	<i>Navajo Nation*</i>	<i>Pueblos Tribal Liaison*</i>
<p>Tracie Brasier Albuquerque/5201 Eagle Rock Ave. NE (505) 383-2431 tracie.brasier@state.nm.us</p>	<p>Beverly Charley (505) 327-2861 beverly.charley@state.nm.us</p>	<p><i>(Farmington Office Outreach)</i> Beverly Charley (505) 327-2861 beverly.charley@state.nm.us</p>

DVS VSO's also make outreach visits to the following communities* on this page. Please contact them to make an appointment.	*Acoma Pueblo	Angel Fire*
	<i>(Grants Office Outreach)</i> Patrick Aragon 505) 287-8387 patrick.aragon@state.nm.us	<i>(Las Vegas Office Outreach)</i> Please call toll free 1-(866) 433-8387 for assistance
Anthony*	Artesia*	Capitan*
<i>(Las Cruces #1 Outreach)</i> Rosa Bycenski (575) 524-6220 rosa.bycenski@state.nm.us	<i>(Carlsbad Office Outreach)</i> Dagmar Youngberg (575) 885-4939 dagmar.youngberg@state.nm.us	<i>(Roswell Office Outreach)</i> Danielle Thompson (575) 624-6086 danielle.thompson@state.nm.us
Chaparral*	Crownpoint*	Deming*
<i>(Las Cruces #1 Outreach)</i> Rosa Bycenski (575) 524-6220 rosa.bycenski@state.nm.us	Raymie Hurley, Patrick Aragon (505) 863-7457; (505) 287-8387 raymie.hurley@state.nm.us patrick.aragon@state.nm.us	<i>(Las Cruces #1 Outreach)</i> Rosa Bycenski (575) 524-6220 rosa.bycenski@state.nm.us
Española*	Kewa Pueblo*	Laguna Pueblo*
Please call toll-free 1-(866) 433-8387 for assistance	Please call toll-free 1-(866) 433-8387 for assistance	<i>(Grants Office Outreach)</i> Patrick Aragon 505) 287-8387 patrick.aragon@state.nm.us
Los Alamos*	Mescalero*	Quemado*
Please call toll-free 1-(866) 433-8387 for assistance	<i>(Alamogordo Office Outreach)</i> Larry Weatherwax (575) 437-4635 larry.weatherwax@state.nm.us	<i>(Grants Office Outreach)</i> Patrick Aragon 505) 287-8387 patrick.aragon@state.nm.us
Raton*	Reserve*	Ruidoso
<i>(Albuquerque #3 Office Outreach)</i> Martín Marquez (505) 383-2406 martinM.marquez@state.nm.us	<i>(Grants Office Outreach)</i> Patrick Aragon 505) 287-8387 patrick.aragon@state.nm.us	<i>(Roswell Office Outreach)</i> Danielle Thompson (575) 624-6086 danielle.thompson@state.nm.us
Santa Clara (Grant County)*	Santa Rosa*	*Sunland Park
<i>(Las Cruces #2 Outreach)</i> Rosa Bycenski (575) 524-6220 rosa.bycenski@state.nm.us	<i>(Albuquerque #3 Office Outreach)</i> Martín Marquez (505) 383-2406 martinM.marquez@state.nm.us	<i>(Las Cruces #2 Outreach)</i> Rosa Bycenski (575) 524-6220 rosa.bycenski@state.nm.us
Taos*	Truth or Consequences*	Zuni*
<i>(Albuquerque #3 Office Outreach)</i> Martín Marquez (505) 383-2406 martinM.marquez@state.nm.us	<i>(Las Cruces #1 Office Outreach)</i> George Vargas (575) 524-6124 george.vargas@state.nm.us	<i>(Grants Office Outreach)</i> Patrick Aragon 505) 287-8387 patrick.aragon@state.nm.us