



The Guardian

The monthly newsletter of the New Mexico Dept. of Veterans' Services
June, 2024

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Half-Scale Replica of the National Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall To Be Unveiled June 28 in Angel Fire

A half-scale replica of the national Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall that has been planned for several years will finally be unveiled at the Angel Fire Vietnam Veterans Memorial on June 28.

The New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) and the New Mexico General Services Department are inviting veterans—especially those from the Vietnam War-era—along with their families, and the public to attend the 11 a.m. dedication.

Like the national wall, the replica wall will feature black granite panels engraved with the names of the 58,200 American service members who were killed in the war, including 398 New Mexicans. The names of 1,244 still listed as missing are also engraved the wall—including 12 from New Mexico.

The replica wall will be on the northeast corner of the Vietnam Memorial's grounds, on a hill overlooking the scenic Moreno Valley below. It is expected to increase the number visitors from all over the country to the Memorial, which currently attracts more than 50,000 visitors annually.



The New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services to Present Its Next Quarterly Veterans' Meeting in Roswell



The New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) will present its next quarterly veterans' community meeting on June 12 in Roswell.

The meeting is scheduled for 9 a.m. to noon at American Legion Post 28 (1620 N. Montana Ave.) DVS Cabinet Secretary Jamison Herrera and staff will provide an update on DVS agency news and events and will be seeking feedback regarding concerns about resources and services for veterans and their families.

Several veterans' service organizations have also been invited to present information and address questions regarding their services. For more information, contact DVS Public Information Officer Ray Seva at ray.seva@dvs.nm.gov or (505) 362-6089.

DVS Cabinet Secretary Jamison Herrera speaking at the last veterans' and community briefing on February 28 in Albuquerque.

SAVE THE DATE!!!

June 26 in Las Cruces

for the next Governor's Veterans Advisory Council Meeting

The Governor's Veterans Advisory Council will host its next quarterly meeting on June 26 in Las Cruces at VFW Post 6917, located at 5845 Bataan Memorial West, from 9 a.m. to noon.

The council is made up of veterans and individuals with expertise in veterans' issues. It meets at locations throughout the state seeking input from veterans to make recommendations to the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) for improving its service for veterans and their families.

Veterans and the public are invited to attend and provide input. For more information, contact Shannon Quintana at shannon.quintana@dvs.nm.gov or (505) 795-5716.


**VETERANS
BENEFITS**

DVS Staff to Make Outreach Visits to Several Communities in June & July

DVS is scheduled to make June and July outreach visits in the communities listed below. Veterans and/or their eligible dependents are encouraged to stop by to file for or ask information about VA disability ratings, VA medical or mental health care, retiree pensions, military burials, and many other VA benefits.

DVS staff can also help with applying for state veterans' benefits such as the veterans' \$4,000 property tax exemption, waiving the property tax assessment for veterans rated 100% permanent and total, service-connected disabled, disabled veteran fishing and hunting licenses, veterans' license plates, and many more state veterans' benefits. Staff will also help with any other issues a veteran or eligible dependent may need help with.

City/Town	Date	Venue/Address	Hours
Artesia	Jun. 13	United Veterans Center/402 W. Hermosa	9am-3:30pm
Deming	Jun. 12	Veterans Food Bank/4045 Overhill Dr. NW	10am-2pm
Deming	Jun. 26	Deming Senior Center/800 South Granite	10am-12:30pm
Raton	Jun. 12	Raton CBOC/1493 Whittier St.	10am-2pm
Socorro	Jun. 25	Forget Me Not Veteran Ctr/705 N. California	9am-3pm
Artesia	Jul. 18	United Veterans Center/402 W. Hermosa	9am-3:30pm
Deming	Jul. 10	Veterans Food Bank/4045 Overhill Dr. NW	10am-2pm
Deming	Jul. 31	Deming Senior Center/800 South Granite	10am-12:30pm
Raton	Jul. 17	Raton CBOC/1493 Whittier St.	10am-2pm
Ruidoso	Jul. 10	Ruidoso Community Ctr/501 Sudderth Dr.	10am-3pm
Santa Rosa	Jul. 10	Guadalupe County Veterans Ctr/720 Lake Dr.	10am-2pm
Socorro	Jul. 9 & 23	Forget Me Not Veteran Ctr/705 N. California	9am-3pm

The following are weekly outreach stops:

Albuquerque	M & W	VA Regional Office/500 Gold Ave SW	9am-4pm
Santa Fe	T & Th	Santa Fe Vet Center/2209 Brothers Rd.	8am-2pm
T or C	Wed.	State Veterans Home/992 S. Broadway	9am-4pm

Please bring a copy of your *DD Form 214 Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty*, which is a necessary document for filing all veterans' benefits claims. DVS can help assist veterans file for lost or misplaced DD 214s.

Throughout the year, veterans from anywhere in the state can contact any DVS veterans' service officer (VSO) for phone or email assistance. The contact information for these VSOs can be found on the back two pages of this newsletter.

DVS Veterans' Service Officer Spotlight



Clarissa Sierra
DVS Silver City/
Grant County VSO

This month's DVS VSO Spotlight is on Silver City/Grant County-based Veterans' Service Officer Clarissa Sierra. Clarissa served six years with the New Mexico Army National Guard as a military police officer with the 126th MP Unit based in Las Cruces—and is thrilled to be back in her hometown to help her fellow veterans with filing for VA and state veterans' benefits claims.

According to DVS Field Services Supervisor Robin Wilson, Clarissa has one of the busiest outreach schedules in the agency that takes her to many locations surrounding her Grant County/Western New Mexico University-based office.

Every month Clarissa goes to Luna County for stops at the Veterans' Food Bank and the Senior Center in Deming. She also travels to Hidalgo County for an outreach stop at the U.S. Border Patrol facility in Lordsburg—where many agents are veterans. Earlier this year she helped organize a PACT Act informational fair at the Lordsburg Elks Club. She also stops by the Fort Bayard Medical Center to help residents in the veterans' wing of the facility, and schedules stops in communities in her four-county area.

“Clarissa has been absolutely invaluable at reestablishing the relationship between veterans in Catron, Hidalgo, Luna, and Grant counties...and with DVS and VA,” said Wilson. “Her compassion, flexibility, advocacy, and true understanding of the DVS mission makes her an outstanding asset to DVS and a fierce champion for veterans and their families.”

An example of this dedication can be illustrated by Clarissa's work with an Army veteran earlier this year. The veteran had been trying for 15 years to upgrade his partial service-connected PTSD disability rating to 100%. He had been rejected not only by VA, but also by several individuals he turned to for help when filing disability claims.

“He came to my office one day as a last resort, not believing that he would get a different result,” said Sierra. “I went over the process, and pointed out that he needed additional supporting documents to support his claim. After hearing all of this, he left with a glimmer of hope that maybe this time could be different.”

Four months later, VA replied with yet another denial. Undeterred, Sierra felt that the case was still strong and decided to appeal the ruling with a higher-level review. Two weeks later, that review came back...with an approval for a 100% permanent-and-total new rating for the veteran—and a new life-changing \$3,737 monthly VA disability check. Sierra was “over the moon! This was my first re-filed claim resulting in a 100% rating!”

“The veteran was in tears, thanking me over and over for helping him,” she said. “But I told him it was HIM who did all of the hard work, by sticking to his beliefs, digging up those supporting documents, and coming to see me.”

“This veteran and his story reinforces for me why I always try my best to help every veteran to pursue all options—and to never give up,” said Sierra. “It's a reminder that getting a claim fully developed by providing supporting evidence can work miracles and can be a life-altering event for veterans and their families.”

Upcoming *Cabinet In Your Community* Outreaches Coordinated by Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham

DVS and all other state government agencies will be at the next *Cabinet In Your Community* outreach events listed below...ready to assist veterans with VA and state veterans' benefits needs.



Office of the Governor
MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM

Cabinet In Your Community

ACCESS RESOURCES • ENROLL IN STATE PROGRAMS • SPEAK WITH AGENCIES



Clovis, NM



Monday, July 8

- State Services Expo: **4 - 7 PM**
- Community Town Hall: **5:30 - 7 PM**



Clovis Community College
417 Schepps Blvd.
Clovis, NM 88101



Office of the Governor
MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM

Cabinet In Your Community

ACCESS RESOURCES • ENROLL IN STATE PROGRAMS • SPEAK WITH AGENCIES



Portales, NM



Tuesday, July 9

- State Services Expo: **4 - 7 PM**
- Community Town Hall: **5:30 - 7 PM**



Eastern New Mexico University
1500 S Avenue K
Portales, NM 88130

Strong Turnout for the 2024 New Mexico Women Veterans Conference

DVS presented the 2024 New Mexico Women Veterans Conference on June 8 in Albuquerque at the Sheraton Uptown Hotel.

150 women veterans and vendors registered for the conference, which focused on educating women about U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), state, and local community benefits available for veterans.



According to the VA, women make up the fastest-growing segment of our nation's veteran population. VA data shows there are two million women veterans in America-- about 11% of our nation's 18.2 million veterans. Here in New Mexico, 12% (16,900) of our state's 141,700 veterans are women.

DVS Cabinet Secretary Jamison Herrera opened the conference by noting that women have been working in some capacity in the military since our nation's Revolutionary War. He said it's important that women who've served apply for the benefits they've rightfully earned for serving our country.

"We are all brothers and sisters in arms—regardless of demographic," said Secretary Herrera, who is also a current New Mexico Army National Guard brigadier general and the state's deputy adjutant general. "It is my job, and the job of everyone at DVS, to make sure not only that you get the benefits you've earned, but also the respect you should get as veterans."

Secretary Herrera also urged attendees to spread the word about two veterans' property tax exemption measures that will appear on this November's general election ballot.

One will ask voters to increase the veterans' property tax exemption from \$4,000 off the taxable value of their home...to \$10,000. The other ballot measure will ask voters to approve a new service-connected disabled veterans' waiver to be based on a veterans' VA service-connected disability rating. Currently only 100% service-connected rated veterans are eligible for a 100% waiving of the property tax.

According to the ballot proposal, veterans rated 90% service-connected disabled would get a 90% waiving of the property tax. Those at 80% would get 80% of the bill waived...and so on down the line, to a 10% rating getting a 10% waiver.

DVS Field Services Division Director Robin Wilson provided information about the process of veterans working with a DVS veterans' service officer when filing VA health, disability rating, or pension claims. She said to expect a lot of questions during a thorough sit-down meeting, because symptoms veterans may think are insignificant could be tied to other service-related conditions that are eligible for VA health care treatment.

"It can be lengthy, and might seem invasive," she said. "But when we ask a lot of personal questions, we're not looking for reasons to say 'no.' We're looking to provide as many ways as possible for the VA to say 'yes' and approve your claim."

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A continental breakfast (pictured, during check-in) and a plated enchilada lunch were provided by the hotel.

Representatives from the New Mexico VA Health Care System talked about a \$1.5 million VA grant which will greatly expand its women veterans' program, other patient services, and LGBTQ+ care and support.

Other presentations were about mental health empowerment for women (GD Psych Services), Creating Lives Worth Living (Kirtland AFB Integrated Prevention, & Resilience Office), Social Security (NM Social Security office), the New Mexico State Veterans Home, Hiring at Intel Corp. in Rio Rancho, Advocacy for Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women (NM Indian Affairs Dept.), and information about service dogs for veterans (Paws & Stripes).

Also attending the conference were State Senator Shannon Pinto (D-McKinley & San Juan), and State Rep. Debra Sariñana (D-Bernalillo). Conference attendees were also able to stop by more than two dozen informational tables before the conference and during breaks.

Attendees were also encouraged to gather information from 20 tables in the lobby that were staffed by federal and state veterans' and community service agencies.



DVS Executive Assistant to the Cabinet Secretary Shannon Quintana (far left), DVS HR Specialist Lori Gutierrez (in light pink sweater), and DVS Chief Financial Officer Danelle Lucero (center/top) helped check in conference attendees.



DVS Cabinet Secretary Jamison Herrera chatting with State Rep. Debra Sariñana (D-Bernalillo), who is also an Air Force veteran.



Several DVS staff attended the conference to answer questions and make appointments with veterans. Pictured here is Roswell-based Veterans' Service Officer Danielle Thompson (*standing*) and her emotional support dog Maddox.



DVS Taos-based VSO Lety Cano (*at right*).



DVS Albuquerque Metro Area VSO Supervisor May Chavez (*at right*)



(**L to R**): DVS Southwest Region VSO Supervisor Miguel Garcia and DVS downtown Albuquerque-based VSO Ronn Saavedra.



(**From L to R**): DVS Health Care Coordination Division Social Worker Therese Castillo, DVS Health Coordination Director Diane Mourning Brown, and DVS Health Care Coordination Division Assistant Veronica Patterson.



DVS Grants/Cibola County-based VSO April Ball (*at left*)

Online Vendor Registration Now Open for Military & Veterans Day at the 2024 New Mexico State Fair

Military & Veterans Appreciation Day at the 2024 State Fair is set for September 10. This is the day set aside by state fair management, the New Mexico National Guard, and DVS to honor and thank active-duty service members and veterans for their service to our country. Free admission is given to veterans showing a copy of their DD214 form or a valid veterans'-designation New Mexico driver's license.



There is a limited number of spaces available for agencies/organizations to set up informational tables/booths along “Main Street” and Heritage Avenue—the two main walkways on the fairgrounds. Registration for these table spaces is being handled by the state fair and is now open via the state fair website:

<https://statefair.exponm.com/p/things-to-do/mainstreet/application-sept-13>

Registration will be done only by this website—no phone call registration requests to DVS or the state fair will be accepted. For more information, contact State Fair Main Street/Special Projects Coordinator Craig Vencill at craig.vencill@expo.nm.gov or (505) 250-6140.

DVS Honors Our Nation's Fallen Service Members in a Memorial Day Ceremony at Angel Fire

DVS presented its annual Memorial Day Ceremony today at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire.

Speaking to the crowd gathered in the Memorial's amphitheater, DVS Cabinet Secretary/Brigadier General Jamison Herrera focused his opening remarks on the importance of not losing sight of the true meaning of Memorial Day. *(right and lower-left photos)*



“Today I ask all Americans...and all New Mexicans...to remember that Memorial Day is more than just the unofficial start of summer. It is more than just a three-day weekend,” said Secretary Herrera. “Please remember that Memorial Day is a day to honor...to cherish... to remember...and to thank the men and women who lost their lives while in military service. To think otherwise would disrespect the legacy of those who paid the ultimate sacrifice—for our freedom, and for our country.”

Following Secretary Herrera's remarks, the keynote address was delivered by renowned photorealism artist Denham Clement. The former U.S. Marine Corps captain spoke about his combat experience in South Vietnam during the Vietnam War.

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The Albuquerque resident (*left photo*) said he eventually turned to art a few years after returning home—not knowing what to do next, and not able to forget what he experienced—and lost—in combat. Much of his art is influenced by his war experience.

“The heroes all stepped across that line. They found purpose in dedicating themselves to a greater cause, without concern for their personal safety or comfort,” said Elliot, who said he was able to find peace after moving to northern New Mexico after the war to finally pursue art as a career. “Even though it happened a long time ago, somewhere among the causes and the chaos of the Vietnam war might still lie our identity as Americans. We need to reflect on these images, and listen to

these echoes of the past, in order to heed them, and listen to them...for fear not only that they might be forgotten, but that they might be erased.”

Additional photos from the ceremony



Vietnam Veterans Memorial Administrator Ernie Sutcliffe (*left photo, at podium*) led the Pledge of Allegiance moments after The Colors were presented at the beginning of the ceremony by the Vietnam Veterans of American/ Northern NM Chapter 996 Color Guard. (*right photo*) The VVA Chapter 996 rifle squad also rendered a 21-shot rifle volley after a live bugle rendition of *Taps* by the 44th U.S. Army Band ensemble (*bottom photo*).





(Left photo) At the conclusion of keynote speaker Denholm Clement's remarks, the author and Vietnam War veteran was presented a DVS coin as a token of appreciation from DVS Cabinet Secretary Jamison Herrera. Secretary Herrera then presented a coin as a symbol of appreciation to Master of Ceremonies Beth Tafoya.



(Above/center photo) Though Memorial Day is dedicated to honoring service member who've lost their lives while in service, the DVS staff at the state veterans' cemeteries in Angel Fire (above photo), For Stanton, and Gallup (two photos below), lowered the facility's flags to half-staff, and placed small American flags at each headstone.





DVS Welcomes Run For The Wall Riders Stopping in New Mexico

More than a thousand motorcycle riders rolled into New Mexico over two days in May as part of *Run For The Wall 2024*— the annual organized cross-country motorcycle ride that honors our nation’s veterans and their families, while also raising awareness of service members still listed as missing in action. DVS staff was there to greet riders along two of the three routes as they stopped for the night.

DVS Cabinet Secretary Jamison Herrera greeted more than 300 “Midway Route” riders on May 15 as the riders stopped for dinner provided by Thunderbird Harley-Davidson in

Albuquerque’s Northeast Heights. He thanked veterans making the ride for their service for our country, and praised all riders for their mission of honoring all who served (*photos below*).



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Two days later, DVS staff greeted more than 400 riders on the “Central Route” who pulled up to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire in the afternoon. The riders toured the monument and the museum before departing for the nearby town of Eagle Nest for dinner at the town’s senior center and then turning in for the night.

Before leaving the monument, a brick bearing the name of U.S. Air Force Sgt. Joseph Matejov was laid on the Memorial grounds by his son William, his daughter Heather, and Sgt. Matejov’s sister Judy Wormmeester. Sgt. Matejov’s EC-47Q aircraft was shot down over Laos on February 5, 1973. Some of his remains have been recovered and positively identified,

and his name is memorialized on the Courts of the Missing at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, HI. Sgt. Matejov’s name is also inscribed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington, DC.

The two routes, along with a third “Southern Route” that went through Las Cruces, started May 14 in the southern California city of Ontario, about an hour east of Los Angeles. The Run For The Wall concluded on May 25 at the National Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in time for Memorial Day.



RIGHT PHOTO: Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Angel Fire Manager DB Herbst (*in red cap*) greets (*from left to right*) Heather Matejov, Judy Wormmeester, and William Matejov after they laid a brick bearing the name of USAF Sgt. Joseph Matejov along one of the ground’s pathways.

DVS Honors Bernalillo County Commissioner Borboa

DVS Deputy Secretary Eric James presented a special framed American flag to Bernalillo County District 3 Commissioner Adriann Borboa at this evening's county commission meeting.

The flag was raised, lowered, and folded by the American Legion Post 13 Honor Guard during the April 2 rededication ceremony of the city's Historic Fairview Cemetery. It was presented to Commissioner Borboa for her role in helping to facilitate a multi-agency effort to restore the city's oldest cemetery, where about 500 veterans are believed to be buried—some in unmarked graves dating back to our nation's Civil War. Looking on from behind, ...from the commissioner's seats are (from L to R): commissioners Walt Benson, Eric Olivas, Barbara Baca, and County Clerk Linda Stover. Commissioner Steven Michael Quezada joined the



Albuquerque Seniors Make Special Trip to the Santa Fe National Cemetery

DVS Deputy Secretary Eric James (*left photo*) and DVS State Benefits Division Director Edward Mendez (*right photo*) greeted 40 elderly visitors to the Santa Fe National Cemetery this morning. The visitors were from several Albuquerque-area senior centers who visited the cemetery courtesy of a pilot program by the Rio Metro Regional Transit's Rail Runner commuter train and the City of Santa Fe's Senior Services Division.



The trip provided an opportunity for these seniors who can no longer drive or don't have transportation options to visit the gravesites of loved ones. DVS Deputy Secretary James and division director Mendez thanked Rail Runner representatives for providing the visitation opportunity, welcomed the visitors to Santa Fe, and reminded them that the nation is forever grateful for the sacrifice and service of their loved ones buried at the cemetery.

LEFT PHOTO: Corrine Vigil placed flowers on the gravesite of her father, World War II Army Priv. 1st Class David Alarid, who passed away on July 3, 1997.



DVS Cabinet Secretary Herrera Meets Veterans at Clovis Town Hall Meeting

DVS Cabinet Secretary Jamison Herrera was a guest speaker at a veterans' town hall meeting on May 22 in Clovis hosted by American Legion Post 25.

Secretary Herrera stressed the need to expand the state's Highly Rural Veterans Transportation Program that provides free rides for veterans to their VA medical appointments. Only fifteen of New Mexico's 33 counties qualify for service from this VA grant-funded program. Curry County and the Clovis area is not one of the eligible counties.

"I have secured additional funding from the state legislature to expand," said the secretary. "I'm asking for your help. If we can find qualified drivers who are able to drive, I can contract with them through the state of New Mexico to help us provide rides. So please help us find drivers."

Secretary Herrera also urged all veterans to help spread the word about two veterans' property tax exemption measures that will appear on this November's general election ballot. One will ask voters to increase the veterans' property tax exemption from \$4,000 off the taxable value of their home...to \$10,000. The other ballot measure will ask voters to approve a new service-connected disabled veterans' waiver to be based on a veterans' VA service-connected disability rating. Currently only 100% service-connected rated veterans are eligible for a 100% waiving of the property tax. According to the ballot proposal, veterans rated 90% service-connected disabled would get a 90% waiving of the property tax. Those at 80% would get 80% of the bill waived...and so on down the line, to a 10% rating getting a 10% waiver.

Any legislation seeking to change state property tax laws involves changing a part of the state's Constitution—and must be put on a general election ballot for the voters to decide.

"These two measures have been talked about for years—and it's finally happening," said Secretary Herrera. "Please cast your vote this November, and also help get the word out and get others to vote."



DVS Cabinet Secretary Jamison Herrera and DVS State Benefits Division Director Edward Mendez talk with Vietnam War veterans and twin brothers Alfred and Albert Rubio.



Amarillo VA Health Care System Assistant Director Michael Lucas (*standing*) chats with DVS Eastern Region VSO Supervisor Matt Barela (*seated at left*) and DVS Clovis-based VSO Ben Padilla.



News from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

VA Names New Director for the New Mexico VA Health Care System

Breton M. Weintraub, M.D. has been appointed by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) as the new director of the New Mexico VA Health Care System (NMVAHCS). He is scheduled to begin on June 10.

Dr. Weintraub is coming to New Mexico from the Fargo, North Dakota, VA Health Care System, where he had been serving as its director since his appointment to the post in 2019. He had previously served as the system's chief of staff.

Dr. Weintraub joined VA in 2002 at the William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital in Madison, WI., before joining the Fargo VA Health Care System in 2012. He earned his medical degree at the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine in 1991 and completed an internal medicine residency at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics in 1994. He is board certified in Internal Medicine, a Fellow of the American College of Physicians, and a member of AOA. In addition to his senior leadership positions, he has continued to see primary care patients on a part-time basis.



**Breton M. Weintraub,
M.D.**
NMVAHCS Director

Gallup CBOC Renamed In Honor of U.S. Army Korean War Hero

The New Mexico VA Health Care System renamed its Gallup Community Based Outpatient Clinic the *Hiroshi "Hershey" Miyamura VA Outpatient Clinic*.

The name change honors the Gallup native and U.S. Army war hero who was awarded the Medal of Honor—our nation's highest military award for valor—for his actions during the Korean War. He passed away on November 29, 2022.

On April 24, 1951, then-Cpl. Miyamura was the machine-gun squad leader in a defensive position near Taejon-Ni, Korea, when Chinese forces attacked his unit.



According to the Medal of Honor citation, Cpl. Miyamura engaged in hand-to-hand combat, killing approximately 10 of the enemy before returning to administer first aid to the wounded and directed their evacuation. Upon a second attack, Cpl. Miyamura manned his machine gun until his ammunition was expended. He ordered his men to withdraw while he stayed behind bayoneting his way through infiltrated enemy soldiers to a second gun emplacement and assisted in its operation.

The citation notes that Cpl. Miyamura ordered that unit to retreat while he continued to fight, killing more than 50 of the enemy, until he was severely wounded. *(continued on next page)*



He was captured and taken to a Chinese prisoner of war camp, where he was imprisoned for two years and four months—losing 50 pounds by the time he was released on August 28, 1953, after 28-months in captivity.

It was while Cpl. Miyamura was still in captivity that he was awarded the Medal of Honor—secretly, because the Army didn't want the Chinese to know who he was. Corporal Miyamura received an honorable discharge from the Army on October 10, 1953. Seventeen days later (*left photo*), President Dwight Eisenhower promoted Cpl. Miyamura to staff sergeant and presented with the medal at a White House ceremony seventeen days later. He was also awarded a Purple Heart, the POW Medal, and the Meritorious Service Medal.

Miyamura had returned to Gallup after his release from captivity and worked as a mechanic. He eventually opened his own garage and service station before retiring in 1985. Miyamura remained active in Medal of Honor Society and New Mexico veterans' events until a few years before his death. His wife of 66 years, Terry, passed away in 2014. Both are laid rest at Sunset Memorial Park in Gallup.

Copays Waived for First Three Outpatient Mental Health Visits Through 2027

VA has waived copays for the first three outpatient visits for mental health care and substance use disorder visits of each calendar year through 2027. VA hopes this will expand access to mental health services and lower veterans' out-of-pocket costs.

This copayment exemption benefits dates back to June 27, 2023, and ends Dec. 29, 2027. To be eligible for this exemption, the outpatient visit must be with a qualified mental health professional at VA or provided through VA's network of community care providers. VA will automatically refund veterans for any copays paid to VA on or after June 27, 2023, for these appointments, with no further action required by those veterans.



In addition to this copayment exemption, VA launched a new policy in 2023 allowing [eligible veterans and certain former service members](#) in acute suicidal crisis to go to any VA or non-VA emergency facility for no-cost emergency health care. Since then, more than 60,000 veterans and former service members have used this benefit — providing them with lifesaving care and saving millions of dollars in health care costs. The policy increased access to no-cost emergent suicide care for up to 9 million individuals, because eligible individuals do not need to be enrolled in the VA system or go to a department facility to use this benefit.

VA has been aggressively hiring mental health professionals nationwide. Over the last three fiscal years, VHA hired more than 9,000 mental health positions including psychologists, social workers, psychiatrists, licensed professional mental health counselors, peer support specialists, mental health nurses and mental health physician assistants.

You can [click here for a link to the VA Vet Centers](#) (CBOCs) in New Mexico that focus on behavioral and mental health care for veterans (*the five locations are found at the bottom of the page*)

VA Approves One Millionth PACT Act Claim

VA has approved its one-millionth PACT Act-related disability compensation claims this month to veterans and survivors since the bill was signed into law on Aug. 10, 2022.

The grant rate for these claims is 75% – a sharp increase from pre-PACT levels – and VA has delivered more than \$5.7 billion in earned benefits to these veterans and survivors.

The PACT Act expanded VA health care and benefits to millions of veterans, including adding “presumptive” service connection for hundreds of conditions linked to burn pits, agent orange, and other hazards while serving our country. Presumptions such as these lower the burden of proof required to receive disability benefits, helping veterans get the benefits they deserve as quickly as possible. The average service connection rate for veterans with these granted claims is 70%, meaning that they receive more than \$20,000 in earned benefits payments from VA each year.

Through the PACT Act, VA has been able to help millions of veterans get the health care and benefits they deserve. Key impacts include:

- **More Veterans are enrolling in health care**

More than 400,000 Veterans have enrolled in VA health care over the past year, a 30% increase year-over-year.

- **More than 5.4 million veterans have been screened by VA for toxic exposures**

These screenings are a critical step to detecting, understanding, and treating potentially life-threatening health conditions. Of the 5.4 million veterans who have received the screening, 44% reported at least one potential exposure.

- **Veterans are applying for benefits at record rates**

Thanks to the largest outreach campaign in VA history, veterans and survivors submitted 2,433,729 claims applications in 2023 – an all-time record and 39% more than in 2022. Veterans and survivors are on pace to break this record again in 2024.

- **Veterans exposed to toxins and other environmental hazards are now eligible for VA health care**

In March, as directed by President Biden, VA announced that all veterans who meet eligibility requirements and were exposed to toxins and other hazards while serving in the military — at home or abroad — had become eligible to enroll directly in VA health care. This expansion eliminated the phased-in approach called for by the PACT Act — meaning that millions of veterans are becoming eligible for VA health care up to eight years earlier than written into law.

VA is currently processing veterans’ benefits claims at the fastest rate in history, delivering more benefits, more quickly, to more veterans than ever before. As a result of this record pace, veteran claims pending over 125 days – known as the backlog – has decreased by more than 100,000 claims since December.

VA and DVS encourages all veterans, family members, caregivers, and survivors to [learn more about the PACT Act](#). If you would like help filing your PACT Act claim, contact any DVS veterans’ service officer listed on the back two pages of this newsletter.



Veterans' Community Bulletin Board

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

DVS invites government agencies and non-profit service organizations to send flyers for publication in *The Guardian* announcing an upcoming or ongoing veteran-related event. DVS will run these flyers as a public service courtesy to the veteran community.

Please note:

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

**ADULT ABUSE AWARENESS AND PREVENTION MONTH 2024
OPEN HOUSE AND RESOURCE FAIR**

**Aging and Long-Term Services Department
Adult Protective Services
600 West Arrington Street
Farmington, NM 87401**



**Wednesday June 12th, 2024
10:00 am to 2:00 pm**



MORA COUNTY VETERANS' RESOURCES FAIR

Friday, June 21

Mora/VFW Post 1131 (mile marker 28.5)

10 a.m. — 2 p.m.



Great opportunity for opportunity for veterans & Guard/Reserve members to learn about VA, state, & local veterans' benefits & resources such as:

- VA health care benefits & counseling**
- Compensation and disability ratings**
- Low-income pensions**
- G.I. Bill for free college/trade school tuition**
- Assistance for homeless & near-homeless veterans & their families**
- Employment assistance**
- Free transportation for VA/VA-approved medical appointments**
- State property tax exemption/disabled veteran property tax waiver**
- VA & state veterans' cemetery burials**
- Starting/expanding your own small business**
- and many more benefits available for veterans and their families!**

There will also be a flag retirement ceremony. Anyone with a faded, tattered, or otherwise unflyable U.S. flag can bring it to this event. VFW Post 1131 will retire these flags in accordance with the U.S. Flag Code—with honor and dignity befitting the symbol of our nation.

For more information, please contact
VFW Post Commander Joe Gurule at (909) 815-3342/gunner_g_ret@msn.com or
Jim Cassidy at jcassidy50.jc@gmail.com



JOIN US VETERANS RESOURCE FAIR

**Connecting
you with what
you need.**

**Offered Bi- Weekly
11:00am-1:00pm
Education Annex
Building 39**

**Friday, May 3rd
Friday, May 17th
Friday, May 31st
Friday, June 14th
Friday, June 28th
Friday, July 12th
Friday, July 26th**

Join for bi-weekly group with attendance from various community partners geared at providing support, resources and direct assistance.

Providing Assistance with:

Food Resources

SNAP
WIC
FOOD PANTRIES

Community Services

HOUSING RESOURCES
MEDICAID
HEALTH & WELLNESS
CELL PHONES/TABLETS

Income & Employment Support

ONE-ON-ONE GUIDANCE
JOB SEARCH & APPLICATION
ASSISTANCE
UTILITY RESOURCES

Partners:



Veterans' Health Administration New Mexico VA Healthcare System

Pueblo of Isleta Veteran Outreach Event

The Veteran Public is Cordially Invited!



Where: Pueblo of Isleta Veterans Center,

4001 NM-314, Los Lunas NM 87031

When: Friday, June 14th, 2024.

Time: 10:00 am to 2:00 pm. (set up time 9:30 am).

We invite all Veterans, their families and caregivers to learn more about VA Health Care, Veterans Benefits and other VA Resources.

If you would like to sign up for VA Healthcare or benefits, bring a Copy #4 of your DD-214 Discharge document, Medicare or other health insurance cards, and a copy of last year's income taxes.

POC: Mr. Terry L. Obago, Program Manager, Native American Veterans Program, New Mexico VA Healthcare System 505-256-5407 or email: terry.obago@va.gov

Celebrating Native Arts with Native Veterans

**UNIQUE ART.
VETERANS.**



Join us for a workshop and discussion
with three Native Veteran artists!

**MONDAY, JUNE 17 @ 11:30am - San
Juan College Student Sun Lounge**

AJ Begay - Beadwork

**Nate Nez - Graffiti Style
Murals**

**THURSDAY, JUNE 20 @ 11:30am -
San Juan College Student Sun
Lounge**

**Elmer Yazzie - Yucca Brushed
Art**

**Lunch is provided. Free and open to the
public. All ages welcome.**

**THIS PROJECT IS COLLABORATED BY KSJE, SJC NATIVE AMERICAN CENTER, SJC VETERAN CENTER,
AND SJC SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES**



Las Cruces Vet Center and
 Dona Ana Community College's Nursing Program
 invite all Veterans, family members & students to attend.



Veteran Health Fair

JUNE

25, 2024

9AM - 2PM

Dona Ana Community College
 3400 South Espina Street, Las Cruces
 Turn into the West Parking lot from Sam Steel Road.

Learn about Veteran services, benefits and programs from
 Las Cruces Vet Center, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs,
 & New Mexico Department of Veterans Services experts.

Call the Las Cruces Vet Center
 for more info: 575-674-2603





Friday, July 19, 2024
10am - 5pm
Gallup Sports Complex
 925 Park Ave
 Gallup, NM 87301



Operation Veterans Wellness 2024

Registration @ 6:00am
 Start @ 6:30am
 Contact Cheryl Toledo
 (505) 722-9470
 ** FREE EVENT **

Back-to-School Youth Activities

Food vendor will be on site



- 10:00am Presentation of Colors**
- 10:15am Welcome Address**
- 10:30am "Creating a Healing Forest: Wellness, Recovery Support, and Community"**
- 12:00pm-5:00pm Gourd Dance (Please bring your own chairs)**
 Head Gourd Dancer: Stewart Jones
 Head Drum: Michael Coan, Turquoise Mountain Singers
 MC: Michael Salabiye

10:00am - 4:30pm Resource Fair (Non-Profit Organizations only)



For more information regarding Gourd Dance call TJ Anderson @ (928) 551-1053

**** THIS IS A DRUG AND ALCOHOL FREE EVENT ****

**** NO SOLICITING ****

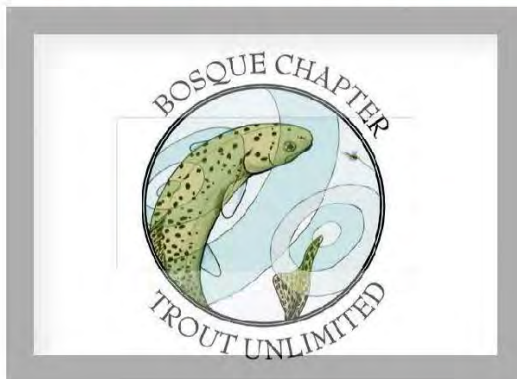
Veterans, Active Duty, and Families

Do You Want to Learn the Basics of Fly Fishing?

The Bosque Chapter of Trout Unlimited and the Fly & Vets

Invite you to

Fly Fishing 101—A Fly Fishing Clinic for Beginners



THIS FREE, ONE-DAY CLINIC MEETS FROM

8:30-4:00 ON JULY 20 AT THE

NORTHWEST AREA GAME AND FISH OFFICE

7816 ALAMO ROAD NW, ALBUQUERQUE

THIS CLINIC IS BYOL (BRING YOUR OWN LUNCH)

AND DOES NOT REQUIRE A TROUT UNLIMITED MEMBERSHIP TO ATTEND

Attendance is limited to 24 Participants

For Information or to Register,

Contact

Jeff Harrell flynangler@gmail.com



Goodwill
Industries of New Mexico 

Patriot Palooza

VETERAN & COMMUNITY RESOURCE EVENT HOSTED BY
GOODWILL INDUSTRIES OF NEW MEXICO'S VETERAN SERVICES

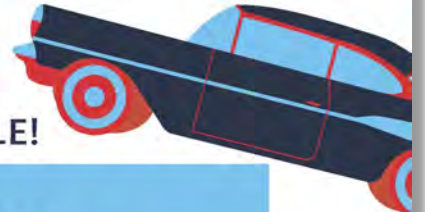
DJ & More!

Disabled American Veterans
Roadrunner Food Bank
Department of Veteran Services
Veterans Health Administration
The Rock at Noon Day
Food Trucks

NM Womens Veterans (DVS)
Valencia Shelter Services
Chicanos Por La Causa
NM VA
Kid's Face Painting
Car Show



SCAN THE QR CODE TO SECURE A TABLE!



OPEN TO THE PUBLIC!
OLD ROUTE 66 CAR SHOW

5000 SAN MATEO BLVD NE

03
AUGUST
2024



11:00 AM
TO
3:00 PM

Are you a Veteran ready to begin living your best life?

Experience a complimentary week full of mindful education, body rejuvenation and uplifting comradery with fellow veterans and their partners in the mountains of New Mexico. Learn valuable therapeutic and holistic tools while leaning in to Post Traumatic Growth.

APPLY TODAY!
Download an application on our website.



Serving veterans and their families since 2009.
YOU ARE NOT ALONE!

2024 RETREAT SCHEDULE

April 28- May 5

June 2-9

August 18-25

October 20-27



Retreats include **FREE** lodging, meals, and activities like massage therapy, acupuncture, yoga, horseback riding and more!
*Travel is participants responsibility.

Eligibility for attendance:

- 1) Veterans diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress
- 2) Must bring a support partner
- 3) Must be free from drug/alcohol abuse for at least 12 months

*Note: New Mexico veterans have first priority. Veterans from other states will be accepted as funds allow.



OUR CONTACT



505-501-8337



www.veteranswellnessandhealing.org



retreats@vethealingcenter.org



P.O. Box 805, Angel Fire, NM 87710



**DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS
DEPARTMENT OF NEW MEXICO
2511 UTAH STREET NE
ALBUQUERQUE, NM 87110
WWW.DAVNEWMEXICO.ORG**

2024 PROGRAM & EVENT INFORMATION SHEET



DAV FELLOWSHIP DINNER

LAST WEDNESDAY OF EACH MONTH 5-7PM
FRIENDS AND FAMILY WELCOME

DAV DEPARTMENT OF NEW MEXICO
2511 UTAH STREET NE
ALBUQUERQUE, NM 87110
PLEASE RSVP AT:
WWW.DAVNEWMEXICO.ORG
(505) 294-6193



CROCHET & TEA

TUESDAYS, 1:30-3:00PM
FRIENDS AND FAMILY WELCOME

DAV DEPARTMENT OF NEW MEXICO
2511 UTAH STREET NE
ALBUQUERQUE, NM 87110
PLEASE RSVP AT:
WWW.DAVNEWMEXICO.ORG
(505) 294-6193



SUPPORT GROUP & SOCIAL HOUR

MONDAYS, 2-3PM
FRIENDS AND FAMILY WELCOME

DAV DEPARTMENT OF NEW MEXICO
2511 UTAH STREET NE
ALBUQUERQUE, NM 87110
PLEASE RSVP AT:
WWW.DAVNEWMEXICO.ORG
(505) 294-6193



CLOTHING CLOSET

FREE CLOTHING FOR VETERANS

DAV DEPARTMENT OF NEW MEXICO
2511 UTAH STREET NE
ALBUQUERQUE, NM 87110
PLEASE VISIT:
WWW.DAVNEWMEXICO.ORG
(505) 294-6193



FOOD PANTRY

FREE FOOD FOR VETERANS

DAV DEPARTMENT OF NEW MEXICO
2511 UTAH STREET NE
ALBUQUERQUE, NM 87110
PLEASE VISIT:
WWW.DAVNEWMEXICO.ORG
(505) 294-6193

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT OUR ASSISTANT CHAPLAIN, ALLISON VAZQUEZ @ ALLISONNMDAV@GMAIL.COM



DVS Field Offices in New Mexico

DVS has field offices throughout the state that are staffed with nationally accredited veterans service officers. DVS VSOs are dedicated to helping veterans with filing VA claims, applying for state veterans benefits, or with helping with anything else a veteran or their family needs with.

Office hours are Monday-Friday from 8am-5pm, (excluding holidays). Though this service is free, appointments are required and can be made by contacting the VSOs below. **Please note: VSOs can also provide help by phone or email to any veteran or eligible dependent calling or emailing from anywhere in New Mexico.**

Alamogordo/Southeast NM

David Henley

411 10th Street #107
(575) 937-5620

david.henley@dvs.nm.gov

Albuquerque (Downtown)

Ronn Saavedra

Dennis Chavez Federal Bldg.
500 Gold Ave. SW/3rd floor
(505) 525-3331

ronald.saavedra@dvs.nm.gov

Carlsbad/Southeast NM

Dagmar Youngberg

101 N. Halagueno
(575) 988-5900

dagmar.youngberg@dvs.nm.gov

Farmington/Northwest NM

Robert Guinn (*NW region supervisor*)

San Juan College Vet Center
4601 College Blvd./Room 1715-B
(505) 327-2861

robert.guinn@dvs.nm.gov

Grants/Northwest NM

April Ball

551 Washington Ave.
(505) 521-8132

april.ball@dvs.nm.gov

Albuquerque Metro Area

Helen "May" Chavez (*Metro supervisor*)

Pinetree Corporate Center/Bldg. 2
4801 Indian School Rd. NE/2nd flr
(505) 274-0393

helen.chavez@dvs.nm.gov

Albuquerque (VA Hospital)

DVS staff (9am-4pm)

Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Ctr.
1501 San Pedro Dr. SE
(no appointment needed)
(505) 383-2400

Clovis/Southeast NM

Matt Barela (*SE region supervisor*)

904 W. Sixth St.
(575) 825-9602

matthew.barela@dvs.nm.gov

Farmington/Northwest NM

Leo Esquibel

San Juan College Vet Center 4601
College Blvd./Room 1715-B
(505) 916-4835

leo.esquibel@dvs.nm.gov

Hobbs/Southeast NM

Fred Solis-Littlejohn

2120 North Alto St.
(575) 241-0714

fred.solis-little@dvs.nm.gov

Albuquerque Metro Area

Mathew Zamora

Pinetree Corporate Center/Bldg. 2
4801 Indian School Rd. NE/2nd flr
(505) 525-3331

mathew.zamora@dvs.nm.gov

Belen/ABQ Metro & Central NM

Rob Miller

Belen Business Center
719 South Main St.
(505) 537-9339

rob.miller@dvs.nm.gov

Clovis/Southeast NM

Ben Padilla

904 W. Sixth St.
(505) 537-1445

ben.padilla@dvs.nm.gov

Gallup/Northwest NM

John Livingston

908 E. Buena Vista Ave/Room 1A (505)
389-8731

john.livingston@dvs.nm.gov

Las Cruces/Southwest NM

Miguel Martinez (*supervisor*)

2024 E. Griggs Ave.
(575) 644-6869

miguel.martinez@dvs.nm.gov

(continued on next page)

Las Cruces/Southwest NM**Vincent Tellez**

2024 E. Griggs Ave.

(505) 216-8782

vincent.tellez@dvs.nm.gov**Las Cruces/Southwest NM****Clint Anderson**

2024 E. Griggs Ave.

(505) 216-8782

clint.anderson@dvs.nm.gov**Las Vegas, NM/Northeast NM****Arturo Marlow** (*supervisor*)

917 Douglas Ave.

(505) 331-8838

arturo.marlow@dvs.nm.gov**Las Vegas/Northeast NM****Jimmy Saiz**

917 Douglas Ave.

(505) 520-5079

jimmy.saiz@dvs.nm.gov**Rio Rancho/Northeast NM****Dustin Newsom**

Sandoval County Admin. Bldg.

1500 Idalia Rd./Bldg. D/room 2041

(505) 221-7190

dustin.newsom@dvs.nm.gov**Roswell/Southeast NM****Danielle Thompson**

1600 SE Main Street /Suite A

(575) 416-2284

danielle.thompson@dvs.nm.gov**Santa Fe/Northeast NM****Phillip Hernandez**

Bataan Memorial Bldg.

407 Galisteo St./1st Floor, Rm 134

(505) 218-3125

phillip.hernandez@dvs.nm.gov**Silver City/Southwest NM****Clarissa Sierra**

Western New Mexico University

1000 West College Ave.

Juan Chacon Bldg./Rm. 138A

(575) 313-5627

clarissa.sierra@dvs.nm.gov**Taos/Northeast NM****Leticia "Lety" Cano**

Health & Human Service Bldg.

145 Roy Rd.

(505) 709-5263

leticia.cano@dvs.nm.gov**DVS Tribal Liaison** (*Farmington*)**Beverly Charley**

San Juan College Veterans Center

4601 College Blvd./Room 1715-B

(575) 241-3322

beverly.charley@dvs.nm.gov**Veterans Business****Outreach Center** (*Albuquerque*)**Johnny Martinez** (*Director*)

Pinetree Corporate Center/Bldg. 2

4801 Indian School Rd. NE/2nd floor

(505) 372-9106

johnny.martinez@dvs.nm.gov

**the DVS tribal liaison focuses on educational outreach and claims-filing assistance for Native American veterans*

**the VBOC provides assistance for veterans and spouses who are looking to open a small business, expanding an existing operation, or securing federal contracts*