

The Guardian

The Monthly Newsletter of the
New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services



August, 2013

Governor Susana Martinez Announces Initiative to Bring National Veterans' Cemeteries to Rural NM

Governor Susana Martinez announced that her administration is developing a strategic veterans' cemetery plan to establish state veterans' cemeteries for New Mexico's rural- veterans. The Governor said the goal is to provide resting places that meet the highest federal standards for the large portion of New Mexico's veteran population that live a great distance from the three federal cemeteries currently available to them at Santa Fe, Ft. Bayard, and Ft. Bliss outside of El Paso, TX.

"Our veterans and their spouses—no matter where they live—deserve a special, dignified final resting place befitting a man or woman who has sacrificed so much to serve and protect our country as a member of the United States Armed Forces," said the Governor at a July 16 news conference at the Bataan Memorial Building in Santa Fe. "And in a state as large as ours, we should be doing everything in our power to ensure that this resting place is as close to home as possible.

"Furthermore," said the Governor, "family members of our veterans should not have to drive hours upon hours to visit the gravesites of their loved ones – particularly when, at a very low cost to the state, we can establish smaller federal cemeteries within or close to their own communities."

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA), 172,595 veterans live in New Mexico—which, at 121,589 square miles in size, is the nation's fifth largest state. Efforts to have additional, large national cemeteries built in New Mexico have failed in the past due to the strict VA mandate that a minimum of 100,000 veterans must live within a 75-mile radius of any proposed national cemetery site. No communities outside of the Albuquerque metro area meet this veteran-population condition, leaving a substantial number of veterans and their families having to travel a great distance for access to federal burial sites. Roughly 131,000 of the state's 172,595 veterans live beyond the 75-mile radius surrounding the national cemeteries in Santa Fe and Ft. Bayard.

To serve these veterans, the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services is drafting a plan which projects a \$390,000 to \$640,000 cost for the development of up to three to four small three-to-five acre veterans' cemeteries in our rural areas. The funding must be appropriated by the Legislature.



Governor Susana Martinez receives a warm welcome as she introduces an initiative to provide State Veterans' Cemeteries for veterans and their families living in rural parts of New Mexico.

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The state could recoup a large portion of this start-up funding by applying for a special VA Cemetery Grant which matches on a dollar-per-dollar amount any money put up by a state or tribal government. Once these initial veterans' cemeteries are authorized and built, depending upon need throughout the state, up to six additional cemeteries could be established in other rural or tribal areas.

The New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services would assume managerial control of these new cemeteries. Any funding committed by the Legislature would be contingent on a community being able to secure the three-to-five acres needed for these new cemeteries. The cemeteries would meet VA development standards and conditions in place for all national cemeteries.

Projected Timeline for Statewide Strategic Veterans' Cemetery Plan

- The New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services (NMDVS) conducts meetings with mayors statewide through Aug/Sept.
- Community and county commissioner meetings statewide through November.
- NMDVS develops applications for 3 or 4 locations with the hope of ultimately identifying up to 10 individual 3 to 5 acre cemeteries.
- Each site will cost from \$1.3 to 1.6 million dollars,—to be paid for by the VA/federal government. However, the VA requires 10% of the cost up front in start-up money. The total would be between \$390 to \$640 thousand dollars for 3 or 4 locations.
- The federal government can reimburse this money via a VA grant to the state once the process is complete. The reimbursed funds can be used for staffing and upkeep costs.
- All applications will need to be completed and submitted to the Federal Veterans Administration no later than July 1, 2014.
- The VA will process our applications, along with others received from around the nation. We would hope for Federal funding at the beginning of federal fiscal year 2015, which begins October 1, 2014.

“This is great news for our rural-area veterans and their families,” said New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services Secretary Timothy Hale “But we have a lot to do ahead of us to make it happen. I encourage our veterans in our outlying areas to contact their community leaders and let them know that this is an important issue which deserves their full support.”

NMDVS to Hold Veterans' Cemetery Town Hall Meeting in Cibola County

The New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services will conduct its first State Veterans' Cemetery Town Hall Meeting on August 14 in Cibola County to present details of the *State Veterans' Cemetery Initiative*. The meeting begins at 1pm in the Village of Milan's Multipurpose Center, located at 405-C Airport Road. This is the first Town Hall meeting following Governor Susana Martinez's July 16 news conference (*see previous story*) launching a statewide strategic veterans' cemetery plan to seek federal VA funding for state-supported veterans' cemeteries for veterans and their families living in rural areas of the state. All local veterans, family members, elected officials and members of the public are urged to attend the meeting to gather more information.

The NMDVS will be conducting similar town hall meetings in other rural areas of the state in the coming months.

Governor Susana Martinez Announces Pilot Program To Hire Veterans For Movie & TV Productions In NM



Governor Susana Martinez announces an initiative—“Operation Soundstage”—to encourage the hiring of veterans by movie and television production companies for projects here in New Mexico.

Governor Susana Martinez announced the launch of a pilot program to put military veterans to work on movie and TV productions in New Mexico. The Veterans Movie Production Pilot Program—*Operation Soundstage*--is a multi-state agency partnership which aims to increase the hiring and training of military veterans for productions by movie studios and television production companies here in New Mexico.

“Movie and television productions offer job opportunities that are great matches for the skill sets our veterans learn through their service in the military,” said the Governor at an August 1 news conference at the New Mexico National Guard Armory in Albuquerque. “As a result of their military training, veterans can lead or take orders—and know the value of the teamwork required by movie makers on any given project.”

Governor Martinez explained the program is the result of a joint effort by the New Mexico Film Office, the New Mexico Department of Veterans’ Services and the New Mexico Workforce Solutions. The program will look to partner with movie and television production companies.

The New Mexico Film Office, through the Jobs Training Initiative Program, currently finances training that helps New Mexico crew members advance their education and become qualified for new crew jobs. These funds are only available for a limited number of positions for each production.

Governor Martinez said *Operation Soundstage* will add an additional position on each production to be filled specifically by a New Mexico veteran. It will also help ensure that veterans who are eligible for the G.I. Bill will be able to access film-career development programs offered at several New Mexico colleges. She said veterans provide an excellent pool of skilled and talented professionals who would be ideal to fill “off-camera” job openings such as carpenters, electricians, editors, technicians, production assistants, makeup artists, caterers, drivers and dozens of other positions typically needed for television and movie projects.

The announcement of *Operation Soundstage* comes on the heels of the latest data released by the U.S. Department of Labor which shows the national unemployment rate of veterans between the ages of 18-24 at a startling 20.5%--compared to the overall June national unemployment rate of 7.6%.

Governor Martinez also pointed out several financial incentives available to any employer who hires unemployed veterans:

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- A \$2,400 federal business tax credit for employers hiring veterans who've been unemployed for at least four weeks.
- Up to a \$9,600 credit for certain service-connected disabled veteran
- \$2,400 for each hiring of a veteran who receives Supplemental Food Assistance (“Food Stamps”)
- The Governor also mentioned the state law she signed last year which gives up to a \$1,000 state business tax credit for each hiring of a recently-returned veteran.

“Veterans make a great fit for production companies working here in New Mexico,” said Governor Martinez. “Veterans have sacrificed to serve our country—and have already proved that they have earned the chance to be considered for any job availabilities here at home.”

According to the New Mexico Film Office, more than 100 movies and television shows have been shot in New Mexico.



Movie producer David Valdes (*at podium*) praises Governor Susana Martinez’s initiative—“*Operation Soundstage*”—to encourage the hiring of veterans by movie and television production companies or off-camera jobs on projects in New Mexico.

“I’ve produced three films in New Mexico over the last five years, so I’m very familiar with the spectacular locations, great cast & crews and solid infrastructure that exists here,” said Valdes. “On the movie we just wrapped—“*Transcendence*”—I learned about the great, untapped resource of hiring veterans who are capable of solving whatever challenge we throw their way. I just love their ‘can-do’ attitude.”



(*Left to Right*): *Transcendence* Location Manager Chris Baugh, Navy veteran Elliot Davis, Navy veteran Jamie Mason, Governor Martinez, and Movie Producer David Valdes.

Davis and Mason were hired for off-camera production work by Valdes on *Transcendence*. They said they were thrilled to utilize their military training and discipline for work on the set—and plan to pursue more production work in the future.

“I think all veterans that get introduced to the film industry, it’s a very easy transition,” said Davis. “The levels of hierarchy, the hours—definitely the long hours—are very much the same as in the military.” Davis said. “But it’s exciting, knowing I helped with a movie.”

Governor Susana Martinez Announces Permanent State Military Veteran Wildfire Crews Program

Governor Susana Martinez has made permanent a pilot program which hires and trains veterans for state wildland firefighting crews--following the program's success during the current 2013 fire season.

The *Veterans' Fire Crews Pilot Program* trained and employed nearly 40 military veterans as Wildland Fire Hand Crews over the summer.

The Governor said that an executive budget request will be made to provide for 60 slots to train veterans to help fight fires.

"I'm very pleased with the results of this program so far and the great job these men and women continue to do, protecting lives and communities across the state," said the Governor at an August 2 news conference at Rio Grande Nature Center State Park in Albuquerque's Bosque. "It is our plan to move this program forward and expand it as our state continues to face increasing wildfire danger each year."



Governor Susana Martinez announced that she will make permanent a pilot program she launched in the Spring which hires and trains veterans for state wildland firefighting crew positions.

The pilot program was developed by the New Mexico State Forestry Division, working collaboratively with the New Mexico National Guard and the Departments of Veterans Services and Workforce Solutions to address the need for more wildland firefighters in the state.



Following their first assignment on the Piedra Fire that broke out on the west face of the Sandia Mountains on May 2, the crews were dispatched on 12 additional assignments, including the Tres Lagunas, Thompson Ridge and Silver Fires.

Currently a crew of ten firefighters is assigned to help mop up duties at the Stable Fire near Jemez Springs. Two additional crews were sent to the Deschutes National Forest near Redmond, Oregon to assist with new fire starts.

Governor Susana Martinez (in black dress) poses with six veterans attending the news conference who were part of the Pilot Program launched in the Spring to hire and train veterans as state forestry Wildland Firefighters.

From left to right: Craig Byrd (U.S. Army veteran), Freddie Jaramillo (Army), Governor Martinez, Aaron Fontes (Navy), Rosa Bustamante (Air Force), Bert Gonzales (Navy), and Brian Filip (Army).

WSMR Soldier KIA in Afghanistan

America has lost another soldier based at one of our military installations here in New Mexico.

U.S. Army PVT Errol Milliard was killed in action on July 4 in Farah Province, Afghanistan, when enemy forces attacked his unit with a Rocket-Propelled Grenade (RPG). The 18-year old native of Birmingham, Alabama was assigned to the 595th Engineer (Sapper) Company, Second Engineer Battalion based at White Sands Missile Range (WSMR) in southern New Mexico.

PVT Wade is the second New Mexican wartime casualty this year—both from WSMR's Second Engineer Battalion—and the 81st combat-related death of an Armed Forces member with ties to our state since the Global War on Terror commenced shortly after the 9/11 Terror Attacks in 2001.



**U.S. Army PVT
Errol Milliard**

The New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services extends its deepest condolences to Milliard family.

Annual Honor Guard Conference Set for Aug. 30



picture is from last year's Honor Guard Conference

All Honor Guard Teams are encouraged to attend the 2013 New Mexico Honor Guard Conference on August 30 at the Santa Fe New Mexico National Guard Armory, located just south of the city limits of Santa Fe at 47 Bataan Blvd (off the East Frontage Road).

The conference begins at 8am with presentations and updates about the Honor Guard Program of the *New Mexico Military Honors Burial Program* from the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services and the New Mexico Department of Military Affairs. The conference then moves outdoors for a demonstration and training by The New Mexico National Guard Honor Guard Team,

followed by a competition between registered Honor Guard Teams. A free hot lunch will be provided for all attendees and participants.

The NMDVS established the *Military Honors Burial Program* to ensure that, upon death, all honorably-discharged veterans be buried with honor and dignity. The NMDVS is committed to supervising all-volunteer Honor Guard Teams throughout the state to provide a Final Salute at a veteran's funeral. This service is provided free to the family of any deceased honorably-discharged veteran.

For further information, or if you are interested in forming an Honor Guard Team, please contact Josetta Rodriguez at (505) 827-6356 or josetta.rodriquez@state.nm.us.

NMDVS, NMVBOC Conduct Outreach at KAFB



The New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services (NMDVS) and its Veterans' Business Outreach Center (VBOC) teamed up for an outreach visit on August 2 at the Kirtland AFB exchange. VBOC Business Advisor Gary Peterson (*left photo*) provided information for veterans or soon-to-be-veterans about ways the center can help start or expand a business.

NMDVS Veterans' Service Officer Sardo Sanchez (*at right, in right photo*) was available to assist with VA or state veterans' benefits.

NMVBOC Takes Part in Laguna Pueblo Veterans Business Conference & Job Fair



LEFT PHOTO: New Mexico Veterans' Business Outreach Center (VBOC) Business Advisor Gary Peterson gave a presentation about the VBOC at the Laguna Pueblo Veterans' Business Conference & Job Fair on July 17.

RIGHT PHOTO: New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services (NMDVS) Veterans' Service Officer Theresa Zuni was also invited to take part in the conference to assist with VA or state veterans' benefits.

60th Anniversary of the Korean War Armistice Observed in New Mexico



The Korean War Veterans Association of New Mexico and the Korean-American Association of New Mexico hosted a ceremony on July 27 at the New Mexico Veterans' Memorial in Albuquerque to commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the signing of the Korean War Armistice. The event honored the service of the nearly 1.8 million Americans who served in the war.

The Korean War began on June 25, 1950 when some 75,000 soldiers from the North Korean People's Army poured across the 38th parallel, the boundary between the Soviet-backed Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the north and the pro-Western Republic of Korea to the south. This invasion was the first military action of the Cold War. By July, America entered the war at South Korea's request. More than 54,000 Americans died during the war—including 189 New Mexicans. 46 New Mexicans are listed as Missing-in-Action. North and South Korea remain at a stalemate today.

VA Hosts Faith-Based Outreach



New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services Secretary Timothy Hale (*center, in red tie*) delivered the opening remarks at a VA Faith-Based Outreach on July 18 at the Albuquerque Veterans' Memorial. The goal was to educate clergy and faith-based organizations about the importance of recognizing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and other post-combat issues in veterans.

"Veterans are conditioned to not complain if they are sick or not feeling well," said Secretary Hale. "Priests and the clergy are often the first non-family contacts made by returning soldiers. You

can help these veterans by reaching out to them and putting them in touch with the VA."

For more information, go to the Albuquerque VA's Chaplain Services website link at

http://www.albuquerque.va.gov/services/Chaplain_Service.asp.

Women Veterans Conference Set for September 7 in Albuquerque



The New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services and the veterans' service organization *Women Veterans of New Mexico* are collaborating to present the 2013 *Women Veterans Conference* in Albuquerque on Saturday, September 7.

The conference is from 8am-5pm at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, located at 1901 University Avenue NE (at Menaul Blvd.) and is free for all women veterans and active-duty personnel. Doors open for registration at 7am. Free pastries, coffee and tea will be provided in the morning, along with a full-meal lunch later in the day.

A free \$40 Walmart Gift Card will be given at the conference to the first 50 women who have pre-registered. There will also be a drawing for free door prizes such as scenic airplane trips over Santa Fe and Albuquerque, a deluxe Bluetooth Headset, merchant gift cards, and many other gifts and services.

Representatives from the Albuquerque Regional VA office, the New Mexico VA Health Care System (NMVAHCS) and the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services will present information about available VA and state benefits available for veterans and their dependents—with an emphasis on benefits and programs specifically for women veterans.



Behavioral experts from the NMVAHCS and other agencies will also have presentations about available programs for victims of domestic violence, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and other post-combat afflictions.

Though the conference is free, pre-registration is *strongly* recommended. For more information and to pre-register, please contact Myra Powers at (512) 917-6881 or nmwomenveterans@gmail.com.

DoD, VA Establish Two Multi-Institutional Consortia to Re- search PTSD and TBI



**VA Secretary
Eric K. Shinseki**

**For more news from
the VA and for Benefits
information, 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)**

**For information about
VA health care, visit the
website of the New
Mexico VA Health Care
System at:
[www.albuquerque.va.
gov](http://www.albuquerque.va.gov)**

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) have collaborated to establish two joint research consortia, at a combined investment of \$107 million, to research the diagnosis and treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI) over a five-year period.

The *Consortium to Alleviate PTSD (CAP)*, a collaborative effort between the University of Texas Health Science Center – San Antonio, San Antonio Military Medical Center, and the Boston VA Medical Center will attempt to develop the most effective diagnostic, prognostic, novel treatment, and rehabilitative strategies to treat acute PTSD and prevent chronic PTSD.

The *Chronic Effects of Neurotrauma Consortium (CENC)*, a collaborative effort between Virginia Commonwealth University, the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, and the Richmond VA Medical Center, will examine the factors which influence the chronic effects of mTBI and common comorbidities in order to improve diagnostic and treatment options. A key point will be to further the understanding of the relationship between mTBI and neurodegenerative disease.

Since Sept. 11, 2001, more than 2.5 million American service members have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. Military service exposes service members to a variety of stressors, including risk to life, exposure to death, injury, sustained threat of injury, and the day-to-day family stress inherent in all phases of the military life cycle.

To improve prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of mental health conditions, President Barack Obama issued an Executive Order directing the Federal agencies to develop a coordinated National Research Action Plan. The VA, DoD, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the Department of Education (ED) came forward with a wide-reaching plan to improve scientific understanding, effective treatment, and reduce occurrences of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury, co-occurring conditions and suicide.

For more information, go to http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/uploads/nrap_fact_sheet_082013.pdf

VA Grants up to One Year Retroactive Benefits for Veterans Filing Fully Developed Claims to Help Reduce Backlog

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has announced that veterans filing an original Fully Developed Claim (FDC) for service-connected disability compensation may be entitled to up to one-year of retroactive disability benefits. The retroactive benefits, which are in effect Aug. 6, 2013, through Aug. 5, 2015, are a result of a comprehensive legislative package passed by Congress and signed into law by President Barack Obama last year.

“The VA strongly encourages veterans to work with veterans service organizations to file Fully Developed Claims and participate in this initiative, since it means more money in eligible veterans’ pockets simply by providing the VA the information it needs up front,” said Allison A. Hickey, Under Secretary for Benefits. “At the same time, it helps reduce the inventory of pending claims by speeding the process.”

Filing an FDC is typically the fastest way for veterans to receive a decision on their claims because Fully Developed Claims require veterans to provide all supporting evidence in their possession when they submit their claims. Often, this is evidence that the VA legally must attempt to collect on the veteran’s behalf, which is already in the veteran’s possession, or is evidence the veteran could easily obtain, like private treatment records.

When veterans submit such evidence with their claims, it significantly reduces the amount of time the VA spends gathering evidence from them or other sources -- often the longest part of the claims process. While the VA will still make efforts to obtain federal records on the veterans’ behalf, the submittal of non-federal records (and any federal records the veteran may have) with the claim allows VA to issue a decision to the Veteran more quickly. Typically, the VA processes FDCs in half the time it takes for a traditionally filed claim.

FDCs can be filed digitally through the joint, DoD-VA online portal, *eBenefits* (www.ebenefits.va.gov). The VA encourages veterans who cannot file online to work with an accredited Veterans Service Organization (VSO) who can file claims digitally on veterans’ behalf. While submitting an FDC provides a faster decision for any compensation or pension claim, only veterans who are submitting their very first compensation claim as an FDC are potentially eligible for up to one-year of retroactive disability benefits under the newly implemented law.

The number of claims in the VA backlog – claims pending over 125 days – has been reduced by 17 percent compared to the highest point in March 2013. Veterans can learn more about disability benefits on the joint Department of Defense/VA web portal *eBenefits* at www.ebenefits.va.gov, and the FDC program at www.benefits.va.gov/fdc/.

The New Mexico Department of Veterans’ Services website provides daily news accounts of veteran-related issues and stories from across the nation.

**To view these stories, go to:
www.dvs.state.nm.us/latest_news.html
click on “Latest News” ...then click on “Nat’l Veteran News**

The New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services

Our Legacy

The New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services was established in 2003 to provide veterans with a cabinet-level agency to address their needs.

Our Mission

To assist veterans, their widows, and their children with establishing the privileges to which they are legally entitled.

Our Vision

To be the premier veterans' service provider and advocate in the nation. Our slogan is "Serving Those Who Served." We will honor our commitment to veterans and remain fully prepared to achieve our mission.

The New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services

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