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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DVS Expands Service of Its Rural Veterans Transportation Program

SANTA FE--The New Mexico Department of Veterans Services (DVS) has launched Phase 2 of its *Rural Veterans Transportation Program* to expand service to now include veterans in Quay, Harding, Mora, San Miguel, and Union counties.

The program provides free round trip service for veterans to and from their home and any VA or VA-approved medical appointment. This also includes confirmed appointments for COVID-19 vaccines. Neither the New Mexico Department of Health nor the New Mexico VA Health Care System (NMVAHCS) are administering COVID-19 vaccines to anyone who did not pre-register and has a confirmed appointment.

DVS has contracted with the Disabled American Veterans/Dept. of New Mexico (DAV), An Angel's Touch, and Golden Spread Rural Frontier Express to provide transportation for veterans to the following VA facilities:

- Albuquerque Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center
- Amarillo (TX) Thomas E. Creek VA Medical Center
- Raton Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC)
- Las Vegas (NM) CBOC
- Clovis CBOC
- Santa Fe Vet Center
- Albuquerque Vet Center

Round-trip rides will also be provided to veterans for any VA preauthorized appointments at non-VA health care facilities.

Veterans must make a reservation with the DAV at least three days in advance of a medical appointment by calling Lupe Cruz at (505) 582-4544 Monday through Friday from 9am-5pm.

Upon pickup, veterans will be required to show proof of veteran status to the driver—who, per COVID-19 safety protocol, will be wearing a mask. Veterans will also be required to wear a face mask for the duration of the trip.

“The lack of transportation is often the reason why many veterans say they haven’t been addressing their health care needs,” said DVS Secretary Sonya L. Smith. “DVS, the DAV, An Angel’s Touch, and Golden Spread Rural Frontier Express are excited and honored to form this partnership to provide this critical service for our rural veterans.”

The DVS Rural Veterans Transportation Program

The Rural Veterans Transportation Program was launched in February, with service beginning for veterans in Cibola, Colfax, Guadalupe, and Socorro counties.

The program is made possible through a grant awarded to DVS by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) Highly Rural Transportation Grants Program. This grant is awarded to qualified organizations that can demonstrate the need and ability to provide transportation for veterans in “highly rural areas” who have trouble getting VA health care due to the lack of available transportation options.

VA defines a highly rural area as a county with less than seven people per square mile, and provided DVS with a list of qualifying counties in New Mexico. DVS will re-apply for the VA annual grant to expand the Rural Veterans Transportation Program beyond the current nine-county service area.

Volunteer Drivers Needed

The DAV is also looking for volunteers to serve as drivers to these appointments, and to help identify veterans who would benefit from this program. Training will be provided for all volunteers, and drivers will be reimbursed for mileage. For more information, call Lupe Cruz at the DAV at (505) 582-4544.

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