

A gathering of Veterans

Written by Story and photos by Duane Haven Sun Correspondent
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3rd Annual Veterans Summit & Stand Down

CHURCH ROCK - The Military Support Group Planning Committee and the City of Gallup hosted the 3rd Annual Veterans Summit and 5th Annual Gallup Veterans Stand Down at Red Rock Park Oct. 5- 6.

The two-day gathering brought together veterans, families, and veterans programs to assist and support veterans' issues.

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This year was different from the previous Veterans Summit. The City of Gallup and additional veterans' entities collaborated with the Military Support Group Planning Committee to combine both functions.

Day one included several veterans' affairs programs to come in and present to the participants about their services and what they offer. A wide variety of support services ranged from education, state, Navajo Nation benefits, compensation pensions, traditional components, and a panel discussion.

The panel discussion was involved, so the veteran who has served can express his and her experiences in the military and how they overcame some of their personal battles and injuries after they were discharged from service.

Day two was the 5th Annual Gallup Veterans Stand Down.

Ben Welch, Community Services Coordinator for the City of Gallup invited programs from Albuquerque and Gallup to support the homeless veterans with their questions.

The original stand down for homeless veterans was modeled after the "Stand Down" concept used during the Vietnam War to provide a safe retreat for units returning from combat operations; they received personal hygiene products, clean uniforms, medical and dental care, and enjoyed warm meals.

"The vendors and veterans' programs are a very important component for the veteran, because the veteran that is participating needs to know what providers are out there for them. That is important to me," Welch said. "I am very fortunate to be a part of team that is very-well organized to serve our community. Our northwestern quadrant is in need of these veterans' events and services."

During the Gallup Stand Down, the Veterans Summit continued the day with a number of

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services and training for the participants. Suicide awareness, housing, outpatient programs and the New Mexico State Veteran Cemetery Program talked about their preparations for the future site for a veteran cemetery coming to Gallup that will honor and carry out the tradition of military men and women who deserve the proper military honors and burial.

Vera John, Clinical Director from the Navajo Nation Department of Behavioral Services in Gallup, was very pleased of the turnout.

“I commend the Military Support Group Planning Committee on their focus to the veterans community,” John said.

The Veterans Summit and the Gallup Stand Down was a team effort and it brought the veterans and their families together to mingle among one another and to meet new friends that they never served with, but have served on opposite sides of the globe.

Story and photos
by Duane Haven
Sun Correspondent