

Overview

The Student Veterans of UNM is a chartered student organization at the University of New Mexico. Through advocacy, fellowship, scholarship, and mentoring, we accomplish the following mission:

“The purpose of The Student Veterans of UNM shall be to serve as the official apolitical organization for the student veterans of UNM, to create a supportive community for UNM’s student veterans and help them succeed in both school and life, and to aid anyone in the transition from military to student life.”

Our wide spread activities and initiatives have led to numerous recognitions including “Best New Student Organization”, “Excellence in Programming”, and “Best Student Leader” at UNM. Recently, Governor Richardson has set forth a proclamation designating September 2, 2009 as “Student Veterans of the University of New Mexico Day” in the state of New Mexico.

Following in the footsteps of advocacy, we have a professional network that encompasses all Veteran organizations and elected/appointed officials at both the state and national levels. We have also recently established a interdepartmental focus group at UNM consisting of administrative staff throughout the university who deal with Veterans and the issues they face.

The following is a brief overview of our most accomplished activities.

Activity Highlights

SVUNM Veterans forum: Ongoing

A forum dedicated, on the SVUNM website and links, to the discussion of topics of interest and is open to members and non-members alike. Community members and UNM students are encouraged to post comments and the forum also provides the latest information and announcements from the SVUNM.

UNM Football tailgating: UNM Lobo Football home games

Taking a break from the everyday hustle-and-bustle of college life and participating in one of the most spirited events that takes place at UNM is tailgating. Our members tailgated at every home game, met new and interesting people and groups at this event.

This was a time when our members have a chance to meet, have a good time, eat some good food, and of course putting on our game faces and rooting for our favorite team...the UNM LOBOS! .

Veterans Forum with Congressman Tom Udall: August 19, 2008



This was a forum held as an opportunity for Student Veterans attending UNM to ask questions of their elected representatives and as a means for the Congressman's office to help Veterans with any problems they face with receiving benefits and services.

Congressman Udall's constituency representatives were on hand to assist Veterans and concerned citizens with any issues. In total there were approximately 28 Veterans at this forum held at UNM.

Welcome Back Days for Fall, 2008 and Spring, 2009 semesters: August 21, 2008 & January 14, 2009

As the UNM community welcome back returning students and new student the SVUNM members set up a table during the Welcome Back days for both Fall, 2008 and Spring, 2009 events. Literature for student and Veterans were made available and members were on hand to answer any questions regarding life as a Veteran attending UNM and the various activities SVUNM participates in for the semester.

New Mexico Employers' Disability Resource Center PSA: August 12, 2008

The SVUNM members worked with the Employers' Disability Resource (EDR) Center, the New Mexico Business Leadership Network (NMBLN), and the National Federation of the Blind on the "I Make a Difference" video spot which highlighted the contributions of Veterans with Disabilities. The project involved the recruiting of members of the SVUNM where they were interviewed, participated in the process of making the video which involved filming in the Comcast studios here in Albuquerque. This video spot was aired throughout the State of New Mexico for the month of October, 2008 to raise awareness of the Employers' Disability Resource and the National Disability Awareness Month.

2nd Annual Homeless Veterans Stand-down and Project Hand-up: September 1, 2008 to October 18, 2009.

In partnership with the New Mexico Veterans Integration Centers (NMVIC), the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services (NMDVS), and the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions, Veterans Section (NMDWS-VETS), and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) this project involved an in-kind donation of time, services, and goods aimed at providing a place where Homeless Veterans could receive services and have access to medical check-ups,

benefits, and services in one place. This project served over 330 Homeless Veterans and involved the in-kind donation from the SVUNM members of 200+ hours, counseling on education benefits and services, and donation of over 1,000 pounds of clothes and over 500 pounds of food, and countless basic hygiene items for the participants. The Stand-down project served Veterans participating while Project Hand-up served Non-Veteran participants.

The SVUNM also acted to recruit volunteers from several student organizations and UNM staff, five student groups; the UNM PIRG, ASE, College Democrats, KIVA, CNM Veterans all participated.



Left: Volunteers and SVUNM members receive an orientation for the Stand-down 2008 staff. Right: SVUNM members brief and guide participants during the Stand-down activities

UNM Disability Awareness Week: October 10, 2008

Our organization was invited by the UNM Associated Students for Empowerment (ASE) to participate in activities and awareness day for individuals with disabilities. The SVUNM sponsored a table to hand our literature for Veterans with disabilities and answered questions regarding veteran issues and education benefits.

Clothing and Food Drive for the Homeless: September 15, 2008 to October 30, 2009

As a response to the call for assistance for the Homeless Veterans Stand-down project the SVUNM organized a clothing and food drive and partnered with three UNM student groups and the UNM office of resource conservation to run this project. The three UNM student groups are the Public Interest Research Groups (PIRG), Associated Students for Empowerment (ASE), and UNM College Democrats. In total over 174 bags of donated clothing items, blankets, jackets, and over 100 pounds of donated non-perishable food was also gathered. Several collection events were held such as during the UNM Disability Awareness Day event and the "Strip Poker" clothing drive both held on Smith Plaza.

National Disability Awareness Month symposium: October 10, 2008

Members of the SVUNM participated in the National Disability Awareness Month New Mexico symposium at the Albuquerque Convention Center with a table. Members were on hand to hand out literature and answer questions regarding student Veterans experiences in attending UNM. Veterans with Disabilities were also encouraged to come to our table to ask questions. In all over 100 individuals came to our table and our organization gave a 5 minute presentation to all of the participants in this symposium.

“Voices of the African American” interview with AM 1600: October 26, 2008

The SVUNM President, Darrin Kowitz, and Vice-President, Zack Mutchler, participated in this interview which was hosted by the New Mexico Office of African American Affairs. The New Mexico Department of Veterans Services Secretary, John Garcia, and the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions State Veterans Coordinator, Larry Campos, also were in attendance discussing issues facing Veterans receiving educational benefits and also the issues facing Homeless Veterans.

Veterans Forum with Congressman Steve Pearce: October 29, 2008

This was a forum held as an opportunity for Student Veterans attending UNM to ask questions of the elected representatives and as a means for the Congressman’s office to help Veterans with any problems they faces with receiving benefits and services.

“Mile of Coins” fundraiser: November 11, 2008

Provided an opportunity to raise awareness of Homeless Veterans and raise money as a community service project the members of the SVUNM planned the first “Mile of Coins” event on Veterans’ Day, November 11, 2008. The purpose of the event was to raise money and donate over 50 percent of the proceeds to the New Mexico Veterans Integration Centers (NMVIC) by asking people to donate spare change where members of the SVUNM would line up the coins back-to-back in an effort to reach a line of coins one mile in length.



The members of the SVUNM committees worked very well together in planning and coordinating the entire event beginning with the planning stage, coordinating with other student organizations, external agencies, and maintaining contact with local media organizations. Press releases and phone calls were done to ensure media coverage and to raise awareness of the purpose of the event.



Our Community Affairs representative worked with the local Albuquerque media outlets by submitting news releases and answering questions about the event. News stations and media outlets, such as: KOAT Action 7 news, KRQE New 13, KOB News 4, and UNM Live (on YouTube) broadcasted the event state-wide with interviews from our members.

The following Newspaper Print organizations received news releases, they are; The Daily

Lobo, New Mexico Capitol Roundhouse, UNM Today, UNM Minute (Public Affairs) and the Albuquerque Journal ran a story of this event.

In total \$1,392 was collected with over \$888 of this amount in coins. The SVUNM donated over \$676 to the NMVIC. Help from the ASUNM Student Special Events (SSE) and ASUNM added in the success of this event.

New Mexico in Focus Veterans Day special: November 11, 2008

SVUNM President, Darrin Kowitz and member, Andy Lilienthal, represented the SVUNM for the Veterans Day, 2008 special. Our members were part of a panel representing their perspective organizations, the SVUNM along with the Blue Star Mothers of Rio Grande. President Kowitz and Mr. Lilienthal talked about the creation of SVUNM, issues facing veterans in higher education, and gave the perspective of an Iraq War Veteran going back to college.

Toys-for-tots: November 17, 2008 to December 12, 2008

Each year the Marine Corps Reserve sponsors the annual Toys-for-tots drive and the SVUNM helped by coordinating a toy drive within the UNM community. Involvement of the UNM Student Activities Center (SSC) and the Office of the President, toy collection sites were set-up throughout the Student Union Building, UNM President's office, Student Services Center. Toy collection locations at the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solution offices in Albuquerque and Rio Rancho were set up by our members and in total our organization managed to collect over 10 boxes of toys for this drive.

“Adopt-a-family” Holiday drive: November 3, 2008 to December 23, 2008

The Community Outreach Committee of the SVUNM planned, organized and hosted the activities and holiday gift deliveries, as well as collecting member gifts and donations. With help from the New Mexico Department of Family Support Services the Sandoval family of Albuquerque was found and chosen, because of the unique and dire situation the family was in, giving our organization and opportunity to help them. Mr. & Mrs. Sandoval have 3 children and one newborn, ranging from age 19 to the 3 month old baby girl.

SVUNM members were very active in obtaining holiday gifts for the family by holding several fund-raising activities, setting up a “giving tree” in the Student Union Building, and helped with holiday gift shopping and delivery. In total the SVUNM donated over \$100 in monetary donations to the family, and collected the gifts from a “wish list” the children and parents made. Additional, donated items included a clothes washer the family needed, donated by a SVUNM member, household and cleaning supply items, and over 100 pounds of food.

Our members also successfully coordinated an awareness and fund-raising activity with the employees of the Sandia Resort and Casino, who were very active and generous in their donations in support of the Sandoval family.

The highlight of Adopt-A-Family was the gift distribution night on December 23, 2008, when our members greeted the Sandoval family and handed out the gifts, food and donated items.



Left: Erik (top) and Franco Flores unload a washer for the Sandoval family. Right: Members of the SVUNM unload donated items for the Sandoval family for the “Adopt-a-family” holiday event.

“ABC Extreme Home” collaborative work & application process: November 13, 2008 to present

With guidance from Lock and Key Productions and partnering with the New Mexico Veterans Integration Centers (NMVIC) members of our organization nominated the NMVIC for ABC’s “Extreme Makeover” by planning a video biography and coordinating necessary staff and volunteers in accordance to the application process. SVUNM members were involved in the filming portion and spent a day assisting the film crew and NMVIC personnel and residents.

We are also working on building support from the local community and businesses for this project and also to share this footage in an effort to raise awareness of the plight of the homeless veterans and that opportunity exist, in the case of the NMVIC, to help.

****NOTE**** - This video, in part, raised Albuquerque awareness regarding the New Mexico Veterans' Integration Center and, subsequently, Rebuilding Together Albuquerque (RTA) donated an entire day of goods and services in order to give the NMVIC a fresh paint job.

“Laughs for Veterans” Charity fundraiser: June 1, 2009

This was a charity fundraiser where the goal was to raise funds through the donations of patrons attending the event. The event involved a 5 to 7 minute comic stand-up routine performed by local comedians. After the routines, patrons attending had the opportunity to vote for the performer of their choice by donating as many times as they wish. The performer with the most donated money collected at the end of the night was declared the “Funniest Comedian in Town”. Additionally, Patrons were given an opportunity to purchase tickets for various raffles and silent auctions at this event.

The majority of the proceeds of this event directly benefited Veterans in need throughout the Albuquerque community, expand our organizations' ability to expand and serve the UNM community, and the winning comedian was able to donate 15% of the proceeds to the charity of their choice (**Presbyterian Healthcare Foundation**)

This event raised over \$2,300 in net proceeds and the SVUNM donated \$1,500 to the New Mexico Veterans' Integration Center

FUTURE EVENTS:

Veterans' Benefits Summit: September 2, 2009

This event is hosted by the SVUNM in partnership with the New Mexico department of Veterans' Services. It is a comprehensive informational portal which will have the full capabilities of handling any and all Veterans' issues and questions regarding the benefits that they have earned through their hard work and sacrifice.

2nd Annual “Mile of Coins” fundraiser: November 11, 2009

3rd Annual Homeless Veterans Stand-down and Project Hand-up: October 17-18, 2009

Continued advocacy to establish Veterans Day as an observed holiday at UNM