Groundbreaking Ceremony a ‘Sacred Commitment’

Written by By Tom Hartsock Sun Correspondent
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Calling the dedication of the State Veteran Cemetery a "Sacred Commitment" to the veterans of northwestern New Mexico and parts of northeastern Arizona, New Mexico Dept. of Veterans Services Cabinet Secretary Jack R. Fox played a very large part in the Groundbreaking Ceremony for the Veterans' Cemetery Oct. 25.

The cemetery is just merely a dirt lot at this juncture with a flag erected that Veterans Helping Veterans raised, closest landmark is the McKinley County Juvenile Detention Center, 2105 Hassler Rd.

Fox delivered the welcome address to the large crowd, estimated over 500, and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Fox also introduced the Miyamura High School Choir, directed by Liam Murphy, singing the Star-Spangled Banner.

Beverly Charley of the N.M. Dept. of Veterans Service gave the invocation. Fox then recognized the dignitaries in attendance and turned over the welcome address to Gallup Mayor Jackie McKinney.

Fox returned to center stage to introduce guest speakers Hiroshi Miyamura, Gallup's Medal of Honor recipient from the Korean War, and George Eisenbach, the Director of the VA Cemetery Grants Program.

The reception for Miyamura was the loudest and longest, interrupted only by the Sergeant of Arms for Veterans Helping Veterans, who brought his already standing members to attention and presented arms in honor of and respect of Miyamura.

The keynote speaker was, of course, Governor Susana Martinez, who delivered a heartfelt message in honor of her relatives who served, as well as all the veterans who put in their time in the armed forces.

McKinney elaborated more on what the dedication of the cemetery meant to him after the groundbreaking event ended.

"Great day in Gallup," he said. "Been working with the cabinet secretary of Veterans Services for the last few years. Good to see it all come to fruition. It's just an installment on our debt to veterans."

According to information laid out in the program for the event, overall, the State Veterans Cemetery Program is a statewide strategic initiative to plan, design, and construct up to four new cemeteries for veterans living in New Mexico within the next five years.

The Gallup based cemetery will provide plots for rural-area veterans and their spouses.

The four selected sites: Ft. Stanton, Gallup, Angel Fire, and Carlsbad.

New Mexico is the mostly rural, fifth-largest state in the nation, but has only two national cemeteries to serve more than 150,000 veterans living beyond the VA's designated 75-mile service radius of these two cemeteries, one in Santa Fe and one in Ft. Stanton, the program states.

In September of 2017, a $6.7 million grant from the VA's Semetery Grants Program was awarded to New Mexico for the construction of the veterans cemetery in Gallup.

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