

## Claims backlog, *from page 6*

backlog is complicated,” Walcoff said. “There is more involved than just the number of people we have handling claims.” VA officials expect to receive 1.3 million claims in 2011, part of a two-year, 30% jump that is greatly hampering VA’s efforts to achieve its goal of bringing the average claims processing time down to 125 days. In a statement, VA Secretary Eric Shinseki said there are long-term plans to harness technology to speed claims, such as establishing a paperless processing system and changing procedures to reduce steps as part of promised transformation. In addition to the 27% increase in benefits funding, the proposed 2011 VA Deputy Secretary W. Scott Gould called the 2011 budget a “watershed moment” for veterans, citing the big funding increases and the fact that the budget includes, for the first time, advance funding for health care for the following fiscal year. The budget calls for 5,715 additional permanent employees, a 2% increase over the current workforce. This includes the 4,000 claims processors, about 1,300 medical care workers and a smattering of additional workers in other departments. The 4,000 claims processors are not necessarily new employees; about 1,800 are currently temporary employees whose positions would be made permanent, said W. Todd Grams, acting VA assistant secretary for management. VA expects big increases in patient loads in 2011 and 2012 as the number of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans seeking treatment rises. About 382,500 recent combat veterans use VA today. A 15% increase is projected for 2011 and an additional 13% increase is expected in 2012,

## Memorial, *from page 1*

Grenada, Beirut, the 1847 Mexican War, and others”, says Smart. He explained that this Memorial is unique in that so many conflicts are represented and more of the conflicts would make it even more unique. Smart is being assisted in this endeavor by Vietnam Veterans John Bright of Sonora, Dave Bonnet of the Central Sierra Arts Council, Bill Chamberlain of Sonora, and George Eldridge of Jamestown. A 4x8-inch brick donation is \$50 and an 8x8-inch paver is \$100. There are four lines (18 characters per line) available on the brick while there are eight lines on the paver. Bright said that many of the donors also opted for the \$10 Honor Certificate which is given to the veteran or their family if they have passed.

Applications for the bricks are available at the VA Sonora Clinic, the County Veterans Service Office at the old General Hospital, and on the VVA-391 web site at [www.VietnamVeterans391.org](http://www.VietnamVeterans391.org) as well as the Tuolumne County web site ([www.Tuolumne.county.ca.gov](http://www.Tuolumne.county.ca.gov)).

Rios is also offering a limited edition of the rendering which is a 16-7/8 by 12-inch color laser print which sells for \$20 and a 12 by 18-inch color laser print featuring a photo of the building and Memorial for \$25. According to Rios, the design was fashioned after the cylinder of the Peacemaker pistol used to bring peace to the old west. VVA-391 is the largest chapter in California out of more than 30 chapters and ninth out of 650 in the nation. The California State VVA Council name the Sonora Chapter as Chapter of the Year. The Chapter sponsors several events during the year and is organizing the Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Parade schedule for March 28 going down Washington Street and Stockton Road.



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