my benefits," Craft said in a recent interview. "I didn't know anything until I came to their office and they laid it out for me."

Now the Veterans Services people consider him their poster child, according to John Garcia, secretary of the N.M. Department of Veterans Services.

"My business grew 400 percent since I was classified as a disabled vet," said Craft, who added that his feet were injured during his military service.

The state Department of Veterans Services, along with the Small Business Administration and other business organizations, worked together to make those programs available to veterans like Craft.

"I don't want to have happen (to today's veterans) what happened to Vietnam veterans when they came back," Garcia told the **Journal**. "We were No. 1 in suicides, unemployment and divorce rates."

Garcia, a Vietnam veteran, was appointed secretary in

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**The Crystal Clear Maintenance logo.**

2004. He had owned his own business and had been the state secretary of Economic Development.

In 2005, the Department of Defense held a national conference for veterans who owned businesses to explain all the benefits available to boost their business.

"They expected 400 people to show up and they had 800 small-business (owning) veterans show up," Garcia said. "I listened and I saw what they had to offer, but I wondered how are they going to implement it at the state level? It was great at the federal level."

He came back and decided to target veterans in business.

His agency partnered with Development Centers and with the SBA and others to set up VETPro, the Veteran Enterprise Training Program. They held a state Veteran Business conference in 2005. They've held two more of the conferences since then, one each year.

During the gatherings, they have what Garcia called "matchmaking," where veteran vendors meet with the federal entities that need their goods and services.

In addition to the annual conferences, the N.M. Department of Veterans Services worked with the Small Business Development Centers to present entrepreneurial training to veterans at locations around the state.

Another recent benefit for veterans is the SBA's Patriot Express loan program. It offers a streamlined application process with a lower interest rate and a higher guarantee for the bank or financial institution lending the money. In addition, a couple of local financial institutions are offering even

qualifying veterans.

"Any veteran qualifies," said John Woosley, New Mexico district director of the SBA, during a phone interview.

Craft was the first veteran in New Mexico to receive a Patriot Express loan for his business.

"My business was growing so fast, we needed $100,000 for equipment and supplies." Craft said. "You bring in your paperwork, your business plan, and you go get a loan. It only took me two days to get that loan."

Floyd Vasquez of the N.M. Department of Veterans Services says, "Doug is at the higher end, he was ready to go."

"Not every veteran-owned business is ready to land a major contract with a federal agency or a prime contractor," Vasquez said. "We can assist new people with the training, the orientation, show them how to hustle and compete. The epicenter of New Mexico veterans in business is at the N.M. Department of Veterans Services."