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For Immediate Release

Santa, HSD Secretary Bring Gifts to Children at State's Welfare Offices Via NM Rescue Helicopter

Santa Fe, New Mexico – December 22, 2002 – The Human Services Department, NM Life Rescue and Santa have teamed up to surprise the children of families who are in hospitals and other clients of the department on Dec. 23. From 1:30 to 4:00 p.m., NM Life Rescue will fly Santa Claus and Human Services Department Secretary Pamela Hyde to the Española hospital, Tom Tenorio Park in Albuquerque and Presbyterian Hospital. (Tom Tenorio Park is located close to two of HSD's Albuquerque welfare offices, and clients have been invited to bring their children to the park to see Santa.) Also loaded on the helicopter will be gifts for 100 children, purchased by the staff of NM Life Rescue.

"This is part of our commitment to our New Mexico community," said Will Ashcroft, chairman of NM Life Rescue. "Our pilots see a lot of children throughout the year and sometimes in very desperate situations. So we decided to offer kids something under a little happier circumstances."

"This is a special time of year for our offices, which serve families every day by providing financial assistance, food stamps and health care through Medicaid," said Hyde. "During the holiday season, many of our offices have their own ways of helping the many less fortunate families whom they serve. They are also busy working with local organizations like Los Alamos National Laboratories' *100 Special Kids Program* to identify families whom in most cases wouldn't have a Christmas at all if it wasn't for the generosity of these organizations."

Hyde recognizes that flying in a helicopter with Santa Claus to help bring in the holidays for the department's clients is a first. "I really appreciate NM Life Rescue's outreach effort, and I look forward to helping Santa deliver gifts to many of our clients' children," said Hyde.

NM Life Rescue provides critical care transport services primarily in rural, northern New Mexico. Their missions include flying highway accident victims and others needing immediate, higher-level health care to the larger hospitals located in Santa Fe or Albuquerque. They use a Dauphin NII helicopter to provide critical care rescue. They have a staff of 18 and are based at Saint Vincent's Hospital in Santa Fe.

Media are invited to the Española Hospital helipad at 1:30 p.m., Tom Tenorio Park (corner of Arenal and Coors Rd) in Albuquerque at 2:30 p.m. and the Presbyterian Hospital helipad, also in Albuquerque, at 3:15 p.m.

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