



# A Beacon of Support

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*By Bob McLaughlin, Executive Director*

Last month, Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center officially opened the Veterans Business Outreach Center, a resource for veterans seeking to open a business or expand an existing business.

The only one in the state, the VBOC is part of the U.S. Small Business Administration. It currently has four employees and has more than 40 clients already. Before May of this year, the closest place for veterans to get help with their business questions was in the neighboring state of New Mexico.

The grand opening was the culmination of months of hard work and now, the VBOC employees are helping veterans get their business dreams off the ground. Mt. Carmel is housing the organization and there is a satellite office at Catalyst Campus Center for Technology and Innovation on the edge of downtown Colorado Springs.

The VBOC provides counseling, training, technical skill development, comprehensive business assessments, and mentoring services to aspiring and existing business owners who are active duty and reserve service members, veterans, members of the National Guard, and military spouses and family members.

The Center is supported by a grant from the SBA to provide training and counseling services for aspiring and existing veteran and military spouse small business owners. Colorado has 48,803 veteran-owned small businesses that provide \$23 billion to the state economy and employ about 96,373 people.

This is the next step in providing comprehensive services to transitioning military members, veterans, and their families. We can provide support in a way we haven't before, and we're very excited about it.

Kia Palmer is leading the VBOC team and will reach into Colorado communities outside of Colorado Springs to introduce veterans to



Bob McLaughlin

programs and ideas to help their businesses succeed. The Boots to Business and the Boots to Business Reboot programs are two tools used to provide support and information to those veterans. The goal is to provide assistance with planning, accessing capital, marketing, outreach, and transition to business ownership.

Mt. Carmel's designation is one of several new offices created by the SBA – new veterans business outreach centers will also be placed in Alaska, California, Iowa (with coverage extending into Nebraska), Nevada, and South Carolina. The announcement expands the VBOC program from 22 to 28 locations, covering all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and American Samoa.

At Mt. Carmel, we believe in supporting veterans wherever they are in their journey, and no matter how long ago they left military service. We are constantly finding new programs and new ways to serve those who served our nation. ■

*Bob McLaughlin*





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## Partner Spotlight



Thanks to two local acupuncture organizations, Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center in Colorado Springs and Pueblo are providing the military community with five-point AcuDetox, a five-needle acupuncture treatment to the ear that has been used to help people overcome trauma and enhance their mental health and resilience. It has been very effective in helping individuals with PTSD. It assists with symptoms such as anxiety, depression, fears, sleep problems, intrusive images and nightmares after a trauma.

Veterans receive complimentary treatments at both the Colorado Springs and Pueblo offices, thanks to partnerships with community organizations volunteering their services. In Pueblo, Southeastern Colorado Area Health Education Center has been offering the

45-minute service multiple times monthly since May and in Colorado Springs, Lake Plaza Acupuncture and Chiropractic began visiting every Tuesday afternoon in July.

The military community is invited to witness how AcuDetox alleviates aches and pains, improves sleep, reduces stress and anxiety, and eases cravings and withdrawal symptoms. If you're interested in experiencing this alternative therapy, please call 719-309-4719 for Pueblo treatments and 719-309-4758 for Colorado Springs treatments.

If you, or your organization, would like to provide a complimentary service to military, veterans and their families, please call us at 719-772-7000. ■



**DID YOU KNOW?** FOR EVERY DOLLAR INVESTED IN HELPING VETERANS, MT. CARMEL **DOUBLES ITS VALUE** IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY



# Department Updates



## Transition and Employment

As we get deeper into the summer months, Transition and Employment keeps moving forward to assist our military community. Briefings continue along with outreach. We are maintaining office space on Ft. Carson; however, space is limited and can only man it once a week. We are working with the Veterans Voice Podcast

to conduct a podcast that is LINK (Learning, Interviewing and Networking Knowledge) and Transition centered. More details to come! Partnerships continue to expand as we have added partners in Pueblo and Denver. We are prepping for the upcoming Patriot Day and are looking forward to what the rest of the year has to offer! ■



## Military, Veteran, and Family Services

MVFS has said goodbye to Amber Hansen and will soon say farewell to Nikki Gibson. We have begun to onboard and welcome new faces, Mik Spillane and Kileen Barker! MVFS has been awarded the Emergency Solutions Grant that will allow the team to help those deemed to be extremely low income facing homelessness stay in their housing and those that are homeless move into housing. MVFS

will be spearheading the Stand Down this year and hosting our first event Oct. 17, 2023! MVFS has been blessed with receiving donations and grant funding that is allowing us to build more robust food pantries in our Colorado Springs, Pueblo, and Trinidad locations. We are always grateful and excited to be able to provide more support and services to our military, veterans, and their families! ■



## Greet and Connect

Greet and Connect has been responsible for processing various new hires within Mt. Carmel and would like to welcome our own newest Client Services Representative Rebecca Weremblewski. We are also working to create effective intake forms for Apricot as well as inputting historical intake forms to ensure data and

stats are relevant for tracking. Greet and Connect has also completed key FOB inventory, has reviewed and streamlined processes within the department and finally, has secured three wonderful front range community service volunteers. ■



## Community Outreach, Events and Volunteerism

At Mt. Carmel, we are dedicated to getting the word out about all of the amazing events, outreach, and community service opportunities to help achieve our organizational dreams. Our goal is to spread the word about how we are currently helping our veteran community.

This year alone, we have been a part of over 100+ events and we are just getting started. If you would like to be a volunteer or partner with us as a business, please reach out to 719-772-7000. ■

# Department Updates



## Health and Wellness

Our Behavioral Health team has continued providing trainings in the community for the SHARP program and for the Child Youth Services team on Ft. Carson. We hosted a one-day, no-cost experiential day in partnership with Holistic Therapy Equine Center. We also enjoyed having Stable Strides bring their miniature therapy horses to our Mt. Carmel campus.

Our Pueblo location now offers art expression classes through partnership with Sangre De Cristo Arts Center, and they continue to provide acupuncture services as well. Next Chapter is now offering services in Pueblo for veteran's behavioral health needs.

We welcomed our new Gateway Coordinator, Vivienne, and we are excited for Charissa to join Mt. Carmel's Fundraising team. We continue to build partnerships within the community to better serve our clients.

We were awarded a grant from Colorado Springs Health Foundation to hire an outside corporation to assess our behavioral health program to identify strengths and areas of growth. We are ever grateful for all of the support CSHF has provided throughout the years.

We are looking forward to welcoming our new fall interns next month. ■



## Communications

Our efforts in communication have been centered around an array of initiatives that have had a profound impact on the community. One such initiative was the launch of the Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC), a groundbreaking venture that aims to support and empower veteran entrepreneurs and small business owners throughout Colorado. Through strategic messaging and targeted outreach, we have set a strong foundation to build upon to spread awareness of this transformative project, shedding light on the exceptional work being carried out by the dedicated team at Mt. Carmel.

As we eagerly anticipate the arrival of fall, a very busy season for Mt. Carmel, we are planning a new marketing campaign. Using a combination of strategic storytelling, captivating visuals, and targeted messaging, our goal is to not only bring attention to the

vital services and programs we offer, but also to inspire individuals, businesses, and organizations to join us in our mission.

With this marketing campaign, we aim to increase awareness of the challenges faced by our veterans, while highlighting their resilience and strength. By showcasing their stories of triumph and perseverance, we hope to ignite empathy and foster a deeper understanding of the unique needs of our veterans.

Additionally, the campaign will serve as a rallying cry for increased support. By illustrating the tangible impact we have on the lives of veterans, we will inspire individuals, businesses, and organizations to stand alongside us in our mission. ■



## Next Chapter

Next Chapter would like to introduce Reina Espinoza who will serve as our new Next Chapter Navigator! Next Chapter continues to make its footprint in the Colorado Springs and Pueblo communities by attending community events and community meetings. Most recently, Next Chapter attended the Silver Keys Summit. Here, Next Chapter

team members learned the amazing stories of fellow veterans and about their resiliency. Together, we continue to build each other up and persevere! Lastly, Next Chapter has started fiscal year 2024 and has already supported over 400 clients in July alone. ■



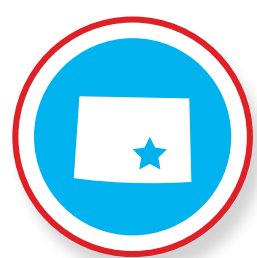
## VBOC

The Colorado Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC) at Mt. Carmel is open and receiving clients. The grand opening was held on Thursday, July 20, 2023. The VBOC will be offering transitioning or active-duty service members, veterans, National Guard and Reserve members, and military spouses management expertise through counseling, training, and entrepreneurial education. The Colorado VBOC will host Boots to Business (B2B) on military

installations throughout Colorado, so service members and their spouses can learn business ownership fundamentals, analyze the feasibility of a business idea, and tap into SBA services.

On Monday, July 17, the SBA announced the launch of the Military Spouse Pathway to Business program. This new program is tailored to military spouses to help create pathways to entrepreneurial success. Each class will offer additional resources ■





## Southern Colorado

Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center established a satellite office in St. Mary-Corwin Medical Center in November of 2021 to serve military, veterans, and their families. Operations officially began in Pueblo in January of 2022. Today, the office is supported by four dedicated full-time staff, including the Director of Rural Services, who oversees daily operations, program expansion, community outreach and partner relations; a Peer Navigator, who provides comprehensive employment support and transition services; a Case Manager, who provides housing assistance, resource navigation, budgeting and other supportive services; and a Client Coordinator, who oversees front desk operations and manages client triage and referrals to partner providers. Currently, behavioral health services are accessible from the Pueblo office virtually through Mt. Carmel's main office in Colorado Springs and are also offered onsite through partner organizations on a rotating schedule, while collaborative efforts are underway to offer in-person, full-time clinical services in Pueblo. The Next Chapter is fully providing transitioning military service members, veterans and their family members with peer navigation through difficult times. And, whether that transition occurred last week, 10 years ago, or 60 years ago, the challenges remain the same. At Next Chapter, veteran leaders, healthcare professionals, and community partners join in a collaborative team initiative to deliver the best support for the variety of challenges veterans and their families face as they write their next chapter.

Mt. Carmel's initial office space within St. Mary- Corwin Hospital was approximately 400 square feet and consisted of a reception area and three small offices. Within our first year, we outgrew this space and are now occupying a nearly 2,000 square foot space that includes 11 offices, a reception area and a conference room. Mt. Carmel's staff occupy the reception area and three offices, while the Colorado Department of Veterans Affairs, Veteran Service Officer, is in a fourth office. One space is utilized for our growing food pantry, while the remaining offices are used by our collaborative partners who provide onsite assistance for veterans and their families on a rotating schedule. These partners include Medicare Mentors, ACI Learning, behavioral health service providers (Spark the Change, CSU Pueblo Interns, Health Solutions), legal services provided Pueblo County Pro Bono Project, Veterans Upward Bound, Veterans Optometry Partners of America, Volunteers of America, Valiant Staffing, and many more.

We also collaborate with other non-profit organizations in support of Pueblo, using our community Helping Hands event, held on the first Wednesday of each month. The Helping Hands Pueblo Community Coalition consists of local organizations and services that help people lead healthier, happier lives. Free food, connections to free and low-cost care are on-site, along with resources to help you navigate Medicare and more. EyeLoveCare offers free

and low-income optometry services and free glasses to ages 21+ and accepts Medicaid and Medicare--plus provides free care for veterans. Grand Avenue Dental offers basic dental care to all uninsured, under-insured, and low-income families. Plus, meet the team of NAHN (National Association of Hispanic Nurses), offering FREE AcuDetox services to those who qualify. Plus, the Pueblo Library team provides summer reading programs.

During the past year, the impact of funding provided by community partners to Mt. Carmel from the City of Pueblo has been profound, with more veterans and their families accessing essential services each month. During the grant term, wraparound support was provided for 256 unduplicated veterans and their families, who received support through Mt. Carmel's core programs. This included 106 families who received nonclinical case management, housing assistance, and supportive services; 64 clients who received transition and employment support; and the 86 remaining clients were connected with behavioral health services, benefits assistance and comprehensive resources provided through Mt. Carmel and partner organizations. Additionally, more than 930 families from throughout the community have been supported through Mt. Carmel's food distributions, while another 1473 veterans have been reached through community outreach' events.

We've also expanded our services into Trinidad with the hiring of Mary Hiney, who is the new Veterans Resource and Development Coordinator for the Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center in Trinidad. She is an Army Veteran and continues to serve in the Army Reserve as a human resource supervisor.

Mary has been working closely with Ray Odum, the Las Animas County Veterans Service Officer. Mary was featured on the Veterans Voice Podcast with Ted Robertson and has been featured on KCRT with Eli Debono, Ray Odum and Linda Barron. Mary is excited to start a support group for the Women Veterans of Trinidad and to grow the food pantry.

She is a member of the American Legion Post 11 and is focused on connecting veterans and family members to important resources. The Trinidad community can expect Mary to be the support they need so that no one falls through the cracks.

We're committed to the Southern Colorado expansion and continue to establish Mt. Carmel as a dependable, well-respected veteran-serving organization and the veterans' choice for services and support. We have accomplished this through established best practices, wraparound services, collaborative partnerships, delivering veteran benefits, and making our community STRONGER! ■





# The Veterans Voice Project

On our development side, we have several paying podcasts under management. We are launching three new podcasts - two internal to Mt. Carmel (one immediately sponsorable) and one new paying client. We are growing our base of paying sponsors with two groups looking at us now, one of which is national. The other is statewide, which can assist us greatly as we push further into southern Colorado. The standing up of our new news service and launch of our partnership with the Business Journal will produce revenue sooner than we'd anticipated. Our push to reach deeper into the local, regional, state and national market is continual, intentional and increases our value to sponsors as we make those gains. Nationally, we're working towards forming a strategic alliance between Veterans Voice and the National Veterans Memorial and Museum mar/com team wherein we will

exchange content and support each other's programs of outreach, putting us both in front of highly desirable new audiences. Local outreach will expand with a new relationship with the Special Forces community and their extensive network thanks to Veterans Voice volunteer, Cindy Centofanti. We have multiple other irons in the fire as well and it's only been a year. We will, no doubt, have ups and downs along the way, but another year and we'll be in places, working with people and organizations, and earning revenue we'd never imagined. ■



## Colorado Springs



## Pueblo



## Trinidad

