



# A Beacon of Support

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*By Bob McLaughlin, Executive Director*

## **VBOC celebrates one year; veterans benefit from business support**

Last May, Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center began hosting Colorado's own Veteran Business Outreach Center (VBOC).

Designed by the Small Business Administration to provide specialized assistance to transitioning military members, veterans, and their families, the VBOC serves people across the state of Colorado from its headquarters at Mt. Carmel.

In its first year, the VBOC helped 477 clients achieve their business dreams, including starting their own companies after leaving the military.

One client, Coty Hansford of Hansford Hail and Dent Repair, credits the VBOC for its help providing access to the financial resources needed to grow the business from two bays to 15, which makes it possible to help more clients. VBOC staff helped with a business plan and connected him to a lender to buy the new location near Motor City in Colorado Springs.

Running a business is hard, but many of the skills learned in the military can help — perseverance and discipline are needed just to get started. And for the rest, the VBOC is here to help. For instance, many business owners assume government contracts are only awarded to large multinational businesses. But going through the federal certification process can open opportunities for even the smallest veteran-owned business. Becoming certified means that businesses have access to contracts that are set aside just for them.

The VBOC staff, now four people strong, is available to provide one-on-one assistance from marketing plans to access to capital. They have partners across Colorado, making it easier for veterans to start, grow, or maintain their businesses. They are a great member of the Mt. Carmel team and a huge help to the other business organizations in Colorado.

Hosting the VBOC — helping provide space, support, and other assets — is just one part of



Bob McLaughlin

what Mt. Carmel can do for military members, veterans, and their families. We're here to meet our clients where they are and to give them a hand up to reach their full potential.

Mt. Carmel staff provides a variety of services: employment and transition support, family services, rental and food assistance, and behavioral health aid. Our branches in Pueblo, Trinidad, Westcliffe, and Monte Vista are open now to help veterans in rural Colorado.

Our goal is to provide the necessary assistance to military families to help them be successful. We want to serve those who served our nation, and it takes our entire community to help us to do that. At Mt. Carmel, we are determined to carry our work to every part of the state. We ask for your support to continue our work. Please donate, if you can, volunteer your time, or let others know the importance of our mission.

As the VBOC starts its second year, Mt. Carmel will continue to find innovative ways to support our community through supporting its veterans. ■

*Bob McLaughlin*





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As the premier leader in sport event management, we are excited to partner with Colorado Springs Sports Corporation this year, offering numerous opportunities for Veterans to volunteer or participate as athletes in their wide range of events from Downtown Summer Fest to the Rocky Mountain State Games.

# Partner Spotlight

Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center is excited to collaborate this year with Colorado Springs Sports Corp, the premier leader in sports event management. The organization is offering numerous opportunities for veterans to volunteer

or participate as athletes in a wide range of events from the Downtown Summer Fest to the Rocky Mountain State Games. Check out their summer events below or visit SportsCorp.org. ■

# Community Outreach & Events

As we welcome the summer months, we invite you to engage in our community events and fundraising activities. If you have any interest, please reach out to the team via email to get on the schedule:

- June 2 - PPIHC Concert at Gold Hill Mesa
- June 14 - Pars for Patriots at the Pueblo Country Club
- July 7 - Mt. Carmel Benefit Concert at Cowboys Night Club

Email: [LCink@MtCarmelCenter.org](mailto:LCink@MtCarmelCenter.org) ■

# Department Updates



## Transition and Employment

**Preparing for the summer season, the Transition and Employment Team will kick off the second hiring event of the year on June 26, with 27 employers registered to attend. We welcome Danny Miller as the newest VIP peer navigator. Danny**

**is a veteran of the United States Army, culminating his career as a first sergeant. We have several events coming up — LinkedIn 101 for veterans, LINK, civilian and federal resumé workshops, and our peer navigator networking and social event. ■**

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## Military, Veteran, and Family Services

**The Military, Veteran and Family Services Team welcomes our newest case manager, Nick, to the team. We are in full planning mode for Stand Down 2024 and the Transitional Housing Initiative. We are sending in weekly orders for cold weather gear to support our homeless veterans at Stand Down — coats, sleeping bags, and backpacks, among other items. Built for**

**Zero, an effort to reduce veteran homelessness to zero by 2026, is in full swing with monthly meetings. Mt. Carmel has been selected as a BOMBAS sock nonprofit distribution site and we will provide socks to the homeless. MVFS has also become an approved site to operate SQUARES reports, which allows us to gather military affiliation and related information more quickly. ■**

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## Greet & Connect

**The Greet & Connect Team is trucking along with daily operations and improvements. Several community partners, such as Colorado Springs Utilities, KeyBank, and Deloitte, are volunteering their time to help us with projects around campus. We are renting out rooms more frequently to host community events, birthday parties,**

**graduation celebrations, memorials, and more. Details about room rental rates are on our website at [veteranscenter.org](http://veteranscenter.org). We are still waiting on parts and manufacturing for the elevator modernization project. Projected start date for elevator repairs is 3 June. ■**



# Department Updates



## Health and Wellness

**We were excited to have our Welcome Home Warrior family retreat and spent the weekend with some wonderful families!** Our Behavioral Health Team completed the first round of Lethal Means training in partnership with MIRECC. Vanguard presented the final findings regarding the Behavioral Health Program assessment, funded

by Colorado Springs Health Foundation. This project identifies what the department is doing well in addition to opportunities for growth.

Zachariah is officially licensed and will be moving into the intern supervisor role. We are focused on increasing behavioral health services in Pueblo and surrounding areas. ■



## Next Chapter

**Over the past couple of months, Next Chapter has been pushing along. Since March 2024, the team completed 90 intake appointments, surpassing a huge milestone of 950 people served! We are quickly approaching 1,000 veterans served within 22 months.**

In mid-March, Next Chapter completed its annual strategy meeting with community partners to share what the program has accomplished in the last year and what to expect moving forward. During this strategy meeting, the team learned the results of the program evaluation that was administered by UC-Denver in December 2023. This evaluation provided feedback regarding program implementation.

Next Chapter has entered the busy season for outreach events! With the strategy meeting kicking things off for the spring season, events are scheduled throughout the next couple of months. Next Chapter hosted its Roselawn Cemetery Restoration Project on May 4 and May 11 in Pueblo. Jose Ramirez, UCHealth Next Chapter teammate, learned that there is an unknown number of unmarked veteran graves in the Roselawn Cemetery. Through the restoration project, Next Chapter honors the veterans and ensures that they are remembered for their commitment and sacrifices to our nation's military. Coming up this summer, the team will continue to host military competency training and attend various events. ■



## VBOC

**As the Colorado Veterans Business Outreach Center at Mt. Carmel ends its first fiscal year and begins its second, the active client roster resides at 477, with 556 counseling sessions and 27 training events. The Colorado VBOC will continue providing business counseling sessions during regular business hours, nights, and weekends. The VBOC co-hosted three Boots to Business classes.**

Since our last update, the Colorado VBOC has been an exhibitor at multiple business networking events statewide. These events include the Catalyst Expo at the Catalyst Campus, the Greater Montrose Chamber of Commerce Business Expo, Pancakes with Partners at the Catalyst Campus, the COS Asian Chamber ELD, the Colorado Springs

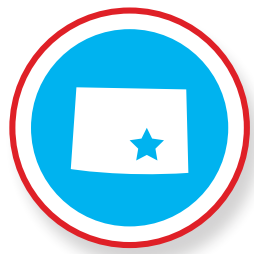
Chamber of Commerce Business After Hours at Springs Pickleball, the 6th annual Business Summit in Pueblo, the COS Asian Pacific Island Advisory Council Meeting, SOCO Small Business Week in Pueblo and Walsenburg, and the 2024 Armed Forces Luncheon.

In addition, the Colorado VBOC will host its one year anniversary at Mt. Carmel on May 31, 2024.

The Colorado VBOC staff regularly attends local outreach events to educate the community, organizations, businesses, and resource partners about Colorado VBOC programs and services. These include VetNet, ACHIEVE, COSSBA, Cyber First Fridays, Catalyst Campus, Colorado Springs Chamber and EDC, PPSBDC, and SCORE mentors. ■



# Office Updates



## Southern Colorado

Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center in Southern Colorado is changing the way veterans and their families access critical support and services. Situated within St. Mary Corwin Hospital, our centrally located facility serves as a comprehensive resource hub for military personnel, veterans, and their families grappling with challenges stemming from their service. Mt. Carmel offers seamless access to a myriad of programs tailored to address the multifaceted needs of veterans, including Veteran Service Officer support, civilian employment assistance, behavioral health counseling, financial aid, legal guidance, family resources, education support, and ongoing peer navigator case management.

**We've actively engaged with key stakeholders, including Mayor Heather Graham, Gov. Jared Polis, and Sen. John Hickenlooper, providing these leaders with informative briefings on Southern Colorado.** Our Community Helping Hands program continues to thrive, aiding over 250 clients on average, while we've also expanded our therapeutic initiatives and upheld our core programs.

Why hire veterans? The answer is simple. Their demonstrated leadership, teamwork, and dedication to lifelong learning make them invaluable assets to any organization. Our Transition and Employment navigator stands ready to guide employers in tapping into this talent pool.

Our Military, Veterans, and Family Service program offers tailored solutions spanning from financial well-being and beyond, bolstering community readiness and resilience across Southern Colorado. Looking ahead, we're excited to roll out Veteran Connections programs in rural Colorado, with plans to designate Pueblo as a One Source Center for Southern Colorado and enhance therapeutic and over-available resources.

For more information on our programs and services, visit [veteranscenter.org](http://veteranscenter.org) or contact Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center in Southern Colorado at 719-309-4719. ■



## The Veterans Voice Project

Veterans Voice is looking forward to a busy summer of celebrating, supporting, and spotlighting our military-connected community and contributing to the mission of Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center.

**Veterans Voice is now offering white-labeling services,**

**along with a new tiered sponsorship plan that creates both sustainability and growth.** As we work to obtain new sponsorships and delve into exciting collaborations, we are grateful for the opportunity to grow the program with authentic passion and commitment to creating a program that brings positive impact. ■

## Volunteer Spotlight

We are delighted to recognize Jeff Symmes as one of our most productive and friendly volunteers at Mt. Carmel VSC. Jeff served five years with the U.S. Army and he spent time in Afghanistan. He prefers to not look back and thrives when he is helping others. Initially visiting Mt. Carmel as a client, he quickly transitioned to a volunteer role. Jeff is a humble and thoughtful volunteer, and no task seems too big nor too menial for him to accomplish. He wants no recognition for all he does; however, he has become one of our most treasured volunteers.

Jeff loves to bike on the mountain trails and volunteer at local bike shops, as well as educate youth in bike safety. His enthusiasm for cycling and commitment to teaching bike safety to youth reflects his passion for active, healthy living and his desire to make a positive impact on the next generation. When he's not biking or volunteering, he likes to spend time with his cat, Jersey, painting, and hanging out with friends at the Burrowing Owl. Thank you, Jeff! ■

