



# A Beacon of Support

July 2024 | Issue #50

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Dir, MVFS

*By Bob McLaughlin, Executive Director*

**M**t. Carmel Veterans Service Center exists for one reason...to support military members, veterans, and their families as they face transitions, challenges, and changes in their professional and personal lives.

We work on that mission every day — through our employment and transition department, military and veterans services, and behavioral health. Our meet and greet team stands ready to connect you to the right service.

And thanks to recent expansions, these services are also available in Fountain, Pueblo, Trinidad, Westcliffe, and Monte Vista. Our goal is to provide services and support for veterans in rural Colorado as well as Colorado Springs.

Since we opened our doors, we've helped more than 4,400 people find jobs, including veterans, military spouses, and adult children. Our behavioral health partner, Next Chapter, has assisted more than 1,060 clients, helping people find support before a crisis begins and making a considerable move toward preventing veteran suicide.

We will be hosting Home Depot in August to continue work on the Next Chapter building on the Mt. Carmel campus in Colorado Springs. In 2023, 200 Home Depot workers built flower beds, picnic tables, and created other outdoor spots for rest and relaxation. This year, they're bringing more than 400 workers to help develop the next phase of the building!

In Pueblo, the Helping Hands Coalition has supported thousands of residents in finding resources for food, health care, vaccinations, and community assistance. The Pueblo office also recently started offering behavioral health service through partners.

But Mt. Carmel's assistance can also include the smaller things that help with health and wellness, such as yoga and Tai Chi classes, art therapy, equine therapy, outdoor trips, and so much more.

As we look toward the last five months of the year, we're going to continue supporting veterans through the Stand Down for those who are homeless and the Transitional Housing Initiative that has helped provide housing, job training and counseling for veterans. We're going to host the second Resilience and Wellness seminar, a



Bob McLaughlin

daylong event focused on providing resources for mental health and wellness for military members, veterans, and their family members.

Patriot Day is around the corner as well. Save the date for Sept. 13, when we'll have pancakes and a ceremony to commemorate the lives lost on Sept. 11, 2001, and during the two decades of war following the terrorist attacks.

We will wrap up 2024 with the Hoedown for Heroes, a fundraiser that also celebrates the resiliency and support we provide to those who have served our nation.

It's been a busy year, and we don't slow down for holidays. We supported four parades over the Independence Day long weekend.

As always, we are grateful for your support and continued commitment to Mt. Carmel and Colorado's military family. We couldn't complete our mission without you, and we're thankful you're here to help us provide vital wraparound services. ■

**Bob McLaughlin**

*Bob McLaughlin*





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#### WESTCLIFFE:

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#### MONTE VISTA:

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## Partner Spotlight

The Quilts of Valor Foundation (QOVF) is a remarkable partner that strives to honor those touched by war with the comfort and healing fibers of a Quilt of Valor. The QOVF is a nonprofit organization that delivers handmade quilts to service members and veterans. Mt. Carmel VSC provides professional in-kind space monthly for “sewing days” and award ceremonies to support military and veteran families for the Mt. Carmel Quilters.

If you would like to request a Quilt of Valor for a friend or family member who’s been touched by war, you can head to the Quilts of Valor Nomination page and fill out a form. For more information about Mt. Carmel Quilters QOV group and how to get involved, contact Mandi at [mtcarmelquilters@gmail.com](mailto:mtcarmelquilters@gmail.com). ■

## Community Outreach & Events

As we continue 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.

- **July 29** - Military Appreciation at Harley Davidson
- **Aug 3** - Collective Groove; Back to School Bash, Gold Hill Mesa
- **Aug 24** - Westcliffe Fundraiser at All Aboard Westcliffe
- **Sept 13** - Patriot Day Give Back

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



# Department Updates



## Transition and Employment

Summer is in full swing! **We had 14 students signed up for LINK on July 10 and 11. Our networking event was at Blackhat Distillery on Jul 11. Jon Dix has finished his recertification as a federal job coach, and the whole team is working toward**

**completing their job coaching certificates.** We have a full slate of classes coming up: Civilian Resumé class (Thanks to Innova Flex foundry for teaching the next two classes!), first Federal Resumé class of the summer, and LinkedIn 101 in August. ■



## Military, Veteran, and Family Services

**As we move into summer, MVFS welcomes our new financial coach, Connor, and new case manager, John. They are welcome additions to our team and have hit the ground running to support our mission. MVFS is in the thick of planning with the Transitional Housing Initiative and Stand Down.** We have received most of the DRMO items needed to make this year a success. We have seen some really amazing partnerships and support develop for our veteran population. While we wait with hope that a new year of food pantry grants will cycle, we have been incredibly

blessed to be selected by a Call to Action to receive a \$25,000 donation to our food pantry. Along with continued donations from the Amazon distribution center, we have the ability to continue increasing food stability for our community. Ronnie's Automotive graciously donated a car to one of the THI participants from last year, who nearly a year later, has remained employed full-time and in stable housing. He now has independent transportation! We are still working Keys to Progress, in partnership with Progressive, to hopefully connect another veteran in need with transportation. ■



## Greet & Connect

The Greet & Connect team jumped right into summer feet first with daily operations and improvements. **Our valued community partners, Deloitte and KeyBank, helped us stain the benches and planter boxes in the front of the building, sand and stain our community connections trailer, paint a couple of our offices, and much more. Huge thanks goes out to these awesome partners that donated their time to us!** The Home Depot Advanced team has conducted site visits to formulate a plan to help us with vital

action items around the Mt. Carmel campus. They are expected to come in August to get the ball rolling. We are also 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. We are still waiting on parts and manufacturing for the elevator modernization project. Projected start date for elevator repairs is 22 July. ■

# Department Updates



## Health and Wellness

Our Behavioral Health Team has transferred all active clients to secure electronic health records. **We are steadily inputting paper files into Simple Practice and will soon start inputting our closed files into the EHR. Zachariah is moving into the role of intern clinical supervisor, and we are gearing up for our new batch of**

**clinical interns coming in August.** We provided mandatory reporter training, in partnership with the Department of Human Services.

We have partnered with A New Leaf Therapy to provide behavioral health sessions in our Pueblo office on Mondays and Tuesdays. ■



## Next Chapter

This summer has been busy for Next Chapter, with a lot of milestones and accomplishments! **The pilot program has officially entered its third year. It has surpassed 1,000 intakes and continues to complete appointments. The team continued to host military competency training events, while participating in community and awareness events across Colorado. Next Chapter was present at the Military Band-Aid Softball tournament. Teammate Miguel Lopez played in the tournament.** Next Chapter also attended the Western Street Breakfast to share information about our programs with the military community. Rodger Johnson and Miguel Lopez also showed off their golfing skills at a couple of golf tournaments in June.

To further spread the word, Rodger Johnson and Jasmine Barry, Next Chapter teammates, attended the OK event in Larkspur to provide information about the program.

On June 12, the Next Chapter Team headed up to Coors Field to participate in the Healthy Swings event hosted by UCHHealth. This fundraising event hosted professional football players as well as local and social media stars to compete in a Home Run Derby. The event raised \$120,000 for the Next Chapter program!

Next Chapter is committed to serving veterans and their family members, and we are excited to see how this next year unfolds. ■



## VBOC

**As the Colorado Veterans Business Outreach Center at Mt. Carmel continues its second fiscal year, the active client roster resides at 560, with 1,134 counseling sessions and 30 training events. The Colorado VBOC will continue providing business counseling sessions during regular business hours, nights, and weekends. Since our last update, the Colorado VBOC has attended events and been an exhibitor at multiple business networking events statewide.** These events include the Women Warriors Initiative, Pancakes with Partners at the Catalyst Campus, Immersion at the PPWFC, Pueblo Golf Tournament,

Cowboys Benefit Concert, Ambassadors at Black Hat, LA Union, Cybersecurity Your Small Business, and AUSA Membership Drive.

In addition, we welcomed our Pikes Peak Business Education Initiative summer intern, Alonso Duran, who is scheduled to complete a 60-hour internship.

The Colorado VBOC staff regularly attends local outreach events to educate the community, organizations, businesses, and resource partners about our 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

In the past months of April - June, our unwavering commitment to supporting veterans and their families yielded significant results. Proudly, we served 159 veterans and family members, providing crucial assistance through core programs such as Transition and Employment, Military and Veteran and Family Services, as well as therapeutic initiatives like Arts Expression and Acudetox. Our Helping Hands Pueblo Community Coalition ensured that 647 community members received essential food security items. Once we include our new partners like ACPC, Colorado DMV and the Colorado Vaccination Department, we have together served over 150 community members.

From April through the present year of 2024, Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center in Southern Colorado has tirelessly served 366 community members, veterans, and their families. Strengthening our dedication, we forged partnerships with new collaborators, facilitating a transformative engagement of nearly 105 participants in the Arts Therapeutic program. Our ongoing support extends to Monte Vista, Westcliffe, and Trinidad through the Veterans Connection program, establishing impactful partnerships in service to veterans and their families.

Looking ahead, we are optimistic about developing Veteran Connections programs in Rural Colorado throughout the coming year. Initiating discussions with the Pueblo County Commissioners and the Colorado DMVA, we aim to designate Pueblo as a One Source Center for all of Southern Colorado. Save the date for January 9, 2025, as we will host the Pueblo Salute to Heroes Reception, dedicated to aiding the veterans and family members of Pueblo, Colorado.

These achievements underscore our adherence to best practices, comprehensive services, the establishment of new partnerships and programs, and the delivery of veteran benefits. Together, we are making communities stronger.

*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. ■*

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## SOCO Good News Stories

### Air Force Veteran's Relocation

An Air Force veteran was living in substandard conditions that were affecting his health and quality of life. We recognized the need for immediate action and arranged for his relocation to a safer, more comfortable living environment. We facilitated the entire process, from finding a new home to assisting with the move. The veteran now resides in a place where he feels secure and valued, and frequently expresses appreciation for the fresh start we helped him achieve.

The relocation improved the veteran's living conditions and positively impacted his mental health. With a safe and comfortable home, he was able to focus on rebuilding his life and engaging in activities he enjoys. This transformation highlighted the significance of our intervention and the difference it made in his overall quality of life.





# Office Updates

## Supplying Groceries to Veterans in Need

Some veterans in our community face hard times and are reluctant to ask for help. By offering groceries from the pantry in our office, we've been able to provide crucial support without them feeling like a burden. One

veteran confided, "I didn't know how to ask for help, but having access to groceries made a huge difference for my family. It's one less worry on our minds."

## "Lord, Heal My Wounded Soul" Retreat

Father Ed, a local Catholic Priest and Navy Combat Veteran, partnered with Mt. Carmel to host a retreat based on his book "Lord, Heal My Wounded Soul," which details his journey to healing from PTSD. The retreat was well-received, providing veterans with tools and spiritual guidance to cope with their own PTSD. The feedback was

overwhelmingly positive, with many participants finding solace and hope. One attendee shared, "Father Ed's retreat was a turning point for me. His story and guidance have given me new ways to manage my PTSD. I can't wait for the next one."



## The Veterans Voice Project

Veterans Voice has a new lead, Taylor "Chappie" Chapman. He is working with host Paul Watson on the scheduling, production, and distribution of the program.

We have met with our sponsors on renewal opportunities and have also begun coordinating with KOAA on an enhanced marketing campaign to spotlight the podcast.

If you know of any special guest ideas, just let us know and we can work them into the calendar and studio openings. ■



## Volunteer Spotlight

Our Volunteer of the Month is Brian Stewart, an intern who works daily in the Greet and Connect program. He dedicates his time to helping veterans and their families, providing essential resources, managing incoming inquiries on the phone and in-person, and offering first response care for veterans in crisis. Originally from Virginia, Brian has been living in Colorado for seven years. He served 13 years in the Army and is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in Human Services with a minor in military and veterans support.

Brian has been married for 18 years and has two children, ages 16 and 17. In his free time, he enjoys playing video games and listening to vinyl records. His commitment to service, both in his professional and personal life, makes him an invaluable part of our team at Mt. Carmel. ■

