



# A Beacon of Support

November 2024 | Issue #51

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*By Bob McLaughlin, Executive Director*

The holidays are upon us! Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center continues to rise and meet the needs of military members, veterans and their families.

Since our last update, we've provided homes for unhoused veterans through the Transitional Housing Initiative and, with our partners, distributed warm clothes, shoes, sleeping bags and other essential items to homeless veterans.

We worked with Home Field Advantage and several other key partners to deliver a Resilience and Wellness Summit to encourage personal growth for veterans, first responders and the military. Additionally, we provided 1,200 turkeys for military members, National Guard and Reservists for the holidays, as well as food coupons to 75 families to help them celebrate the season. Through our Angel Tree program, we're supporting others by enabling people to adopt families with children and provide them with a very merry holiday.

In this past year, we've continued to expand the Next Chapter program, recently achieving a 1,180 clients-served milestone in partnership with UCHHealth, NAMI, and the State's BHA office.

We've also expanded behavioral health offerings in Pueblo, Westcliffe, Trinidad and Alamosa through an Arts in Society grant. Cumulatively, we've counseled more than 4,000 people through their behavioral health concerns.

We held our most successful hiring event in Mt. Carmel's history – connecting 120 veterans and transitioning military members with 32 employers and surpassing our goal of 4,400 positions filled this year.

This month we also participated in the successful 17th Annual Veterans Small Business Summit; our Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC) hosted the opening reception.

These achievements were only possible with our tremendous partners, consisting of more than 430 organizations that collaborate to meet the needs of Southern Colorado.

We're deeply grateful to work with our partners in serving those who have served others and are honored to be the place our heroes can rely on to receive assistance without



Bob McLaughlin

reservation or judgement. Regardless of time served or type of discharge, Mt. Carmel exists to provide a helping hand to others.

During this season of giving, we're here to ask for your help to continue our mission. Your financial contribution provides the means to reach every veteran in need in Colorado — whether it's a job they seek, food for their families or behavioral health assistance. Your donations go directly to support these veterans. For every dollar you give, Mt. Carmel doubles its impact, returning two dollars in services to the community. Furthermore, we need volunteers to help with major community events like our bi-monthly food distributions and our annual fundraiser, Hoedown for Heroes.

Help us serve those who have sacrificed for our nation. Support our enduring mission and give to Mt. Carmel today. ■

**Bob McLaughlin**  
**Colonel (Ret.), U.S. Army**

*Bob McLaughlin*





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## Partner Spotlight

For over three decades, the Senior Resource Council has been a cornerstone of support for senior-focused professionals in the Pikes Peak region. Established in 1988, SRC is dedicated to enhancing the lives of seniors by offering invaluable resources, education and networking opportunities to its members.

SRC is more than just an association; it's a vibrant community of businesses and organizations committed to the well-being of seniors. Its diverse membership spans a wide array of services, united by a shared mission to deliver exceptional care and support with the highest level of integrity. SRC fosters collaboration among its members, promoting the development of best practices and the continuous improvement of service standards in the industry.

SRC's core values—resourcefulness, inclusivity and relevance—shine through its offerings. The council provides ongoing education, fosters meaningful connections



and encourages the sharing of resources to keep their members at the forefront of senior care. Through these efforts, SRC not only empowers its members, they also ensure that seniors and their families have access to top-notch care and support. Whether you're a senior-industry professional seeking growth opportunities or a member of the public in need of trusted referrals, Senior Resource Council stands ready to assist. Their commitment to excellence and community engagement makes them a vital partner in enhancing the quality of life for seniors in the region.

For more information, contact Jaime Wuilliez, vice president of the board, at 407-963-8204 or [jaime@thebranchco.com](mailto:jaime@thebranchco.com). ■



# Department Updates



## Transition and Employment

As fall is upon us and winter is coming, we're changing lives through our work! Our goal is to finish 2024 strong and continue that progress next year. **We had a record-setting hiring event at the end of September, with 120 job seekers and 32 employers participating,**

**and LINK had the largest class to date with 10 students.**

Join us in welcoming Jenni, our newest military spouse peer navigator certified in career coaching! ■



## Military, Veteran, and Family Services

The MVFS team wrapped up our second year of Stand Down and the Transitional Housing Initiative. We saw a decrease in the number of participants this year with 110 in attendance, which we count as a blessing and testament to the support given to our veteran population.

**At THI, we were able to place seven people in homes, as well as provide them food, clothing and furnishings. This is all thanks to our partners, who also hosted job interviews for those clients and—most importantly—made**

**sure that each one felt seen, heard and supported.**

**We are on the hunt for a new financial coach and owe a thank you to one of our own, Nick, who is pulling double duty as a temporary fill-in for the position.**

Thanksgiving 2024 is underway with 75 gift cards heading out to our veteran community in El Paso County, and more being sent to Pueblo County residents. We are looking forward to end-of-the-year events and activities, and staying focused on the projects at hand. ■



## Greet & Connect

**We are proud to announce that our elevator is back online! The Greet & Connect team jumped right into the season of giving with daily operations and support for our Patriots Day event, Homeless Veteran Stand Down and much more.**

Recently, we launched a new Digital Navigator Program with Digital Ally, designed to support veterans facing technological challenges. This program helps veterans become tech savvy and overcome barriers to digital access through personalized

guidance, ensuring they can fully engage in the digital world.

Additionally, as we move into the holiday season, the G&C team frequently rents out their space for various events and programs, making it a versatile community hub. If you know anybody that is in need of space for an event, please have them contact our front desk.

We are ready to finish this year strong serving military, veterans and their families! ■

# Department Updates



## Health and Wellness

Our Behavioral Health Team hired a new Auditing and Information Specialist–Nikki Hamilton–and has been focused on using Arts in Society grants to expand access to the arts in Southern Colorado.

**We have provided training and presentations in the community and on Ft. Carson, as well as participated in community collaboratives to support our military community. We continue to have a 95% satisfaction rating**

**and have served almost 4,500 clients over the years.**

We are also working closely with MIRECC and the VA to increase Lethal Means Safety counseling and information access for our clients, with free pistol safes available for our military community and their families.

As we move towards 2025, we have been working diligently to ensure our clients receive the best care by optimizing our procedures. ■



## Next Chapter

As we welcome the colder weather, Next Chapter continues its commitment to veterans and their families. **We have been actively working towards 1,200 intakes since our inception and are proud to serve our community.**

Next Chapter has continued to facilitate the military competency training for community providers in Pueblo and Colorado Springs. We would like to give our team a HUGE shout out as they have been busy with over 15 community outreach events in Pueblo and Colorado Springs since August!

Next Chapter would also like to recognize and congratulate Jasmine, our intake specialist for almost two years. Recently, she obtained a master's degree in social work!

As we move to the end of the year, we look forward to continuing our work with community leaders, partners and clients to provide easy access to care. We are excited to finish this year exactly how we started, supporting our community. ■



## VBOC

**As the Colorado Veterans Business Outreach Center at Mt. Carmel continues its second fiscal year, the active client roster resides at 667, with 1,365 counseling sessions and 40 training events. The Colorado VBOC is proud to continue providing business counseling sessions.**

Since our last update, the Colorado VBOC has attended and been an exhibitor at multiple business networking events statewide including the Small Business Summit, Pancakes with Partners at the Catalyst Campus, Introduction to VBOC, Getting Your Small Business Contract Ready, Planning Your Small Business, Access

to Capital workshop, Colorado Enterprise Fund Marketing class, and the 17th annual Veterans Small Business Conference.

In addition, we welcomed Elizabeth Bascombe, our Pikes Peak Workforce Center intern, who completed her 300-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, Mi Casa and SCORE mentors. ■



# Office Updates



## Southern Colorado



PUEBLO: We are unwavering in our commitment to serving military members, veterans and their families across Southern Colorado and Pueblo. Our approach is rooted in responding to the dynamic needs of the Pueblo veteran and military community, whether through in-person engagement or virtual support.

From September through November, we made substantial progress by partnering with four new community agencies,

providing essential updates on veteran needs to Pueblo leadership and strengthening our network of partnerships. The Veterans Community Update was instrumental in reinforcing connections with local and state leaders, ensuring that veterans remain a priority in community planning.

Our team engaged in impactful activities across Pueblo including supporting Pueblo's Legal Day, contributing to PEDCO's Human Resources meeting to advance veteran employment and representing our mission at the Center Toward Self Reliance and at events like the NAACP Freedom Banquet.

Additionally, in partnership with the Mt. Carmel Quilters, we distributed nine quilts to veterans impacted by war, and through the Helping Hand Community Coalition, we provided direct support to over 700+ community members, with 15% of them being veterans.

This period also involved focused communication and actions around three critical areas of concern for Southern Colorado veterans: mental health, access to care with MedRide and our collaboration with the Colorado DMVA to bring a Southern Colorado Veterans One Source



Center to the region. We also participated in the Veterans Day ceremony and engaged in discussions with the Center for American Values on potential partnership opportunities.

Furthermore, our collaboration with

United Way has positioned us to provide veterans with essential tax services and financial budget assessments, helping them establish stronger financial foundations. Our partnership with Care and Share has addressed food insecurity by distributing groceries to 900 rural veterans.

At our monthly Helping Hands event, we connected over 2,400 community members with critical resources, fostering a resilient network of support within our veteran community.

Our advocacy remains steadfast, ensuring that veterans are recognized and receive the services and resources they deserve. Together, we are amplifying their voices and reinforcing our collective dedication to the well-being of those who have served. ■



## Pueblo Volunteer Spotlight:

Our Volunteer Spotlight is Mary Ann Lopez, a dedicated and invaluable member of our team. Mary Ann has provided hands-on support at every Helping Hands event since its inception, arriving first and staying until the very end. She leads by example, organizing tasks and guiding other volunteers with skill and compassion. A true advocate for veterans, Mary Ann is a community-driven individual who consistently seeks ways to support those who have served. Her warmth and empathy shine through in her interactions with every client in need, making her a beloved and respected presence in our community. ■





# Office Updates

## SOCO Good News Stories:

**\*\*Veteran Reintegration Program: From Homeless to Sustainable in 30 Days** We assisted 48 homeless veterans at the Pueblo Homeless Stand Down on September 27. One veteran stood out and has made remarkable progress, with the support of our team. This veteran faced significant obstacles, including a 40-day incarceration due to a DUI that left him homeless upon release. Seeing his immediate needs, we provided him with a 30-day bus pass, a new bike and bike lock to support his job search. Thanks to guidance from our Transition & Employment Peer Navigator, he secured a management position at a local business.

In addition, Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center addressed his food insecurity through gift cards donated by a local restaurant. With the support of POSADA and Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center, he secured an affordable one-bedroom apartment close to his new job, allowing him to transition out of shelter services at the Rescue Mission. The Mt. Carmel Quilters, one of our wonderful community partners, fully furnished his new home with essential items.

This veteran is also prioritizing his emotional recovery, actively using resources to heal and focus on building a brighter future. His resilience and commitment to becoming a productive member of the Pueblo community exemplify the transformative potential of our reintegration program.

We're honored to play a role in his journey to self-sufficiency, and with your support, we're committed to making stories like his possible for even more veterans.

**\*\*\*** On October 15, 2024, an elderly veteran who is already in our system visited us after receiving a citation from the city requiring him to clean up his yard or face fines.

Understanding that he was physically unable to manage the cleanup on his own, we reached out to CSU Pueblo Upward Bound, who confirmed that some of his VTC or VUB veterans could assist with the task. With the support of our team and CSUP's group of veterans, everything is set for the yard cleanup, ensuring this veteran can avoid city fines and receive the assistance he needs.

**\*\*\*** On November 12, 2024, In a heartwarming display of community support, Art of the Spirits Whiskey LLC, a cherished partner of Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center, reached out with a question that carried immense weight: "Do you know of any veteran families in need?" With no hesitation, we answered with the stories of three brave families—single mothers, each a veteran, all raising young children with strength and resilience, and all in need of a little extra support.

Art of the Spirits Whiskey LLC acted quickly, arranging a surprise trip to Costco for these three families, offering them an unforgettable shopping experience. The families walked through the doors with their children, wide-eyed with excitement and awe, surrounded by shelves of essentials and possibilities. This day was about more than a shopping trip—it was about giving these mothers and children a taste of relief, support and joy that extended beyond any material gift.

The shopping spree allowed these mothers to fill their carts with necessities—food, fresh produce, dairy items, cleaning supplies, toiletries, baby diapers, laundry detergent, socks, blankets, and toys for the kids. Their generosity extended further to include kitchen essentials like pots, pans, utensils, and even personal items like clothing and hygiene products.

Each item they picked wasn't just a product off the shelf; it was a reminder of the community rallying behind them, making their lives a little easier and showing them that they are seen, appreciated and supported.

For these families, Art of the Spirits Whiskey LLC's kindness was more than a simple act of charity; it was a profound gesture of care that touched each of their lives deeply. Each smile, each grateful look and each item added to the cart was a reminder that their community stands beside them, lifting them up when needed.

To Art of the Spirits Whiskey LLC, we extend our deepest gratitude. This act of generosity is more than just providing for needs—it is a gift of hope, a reminder that they are not alone and that there are people who genuinely care about their well-being. This day will be remembered not only for what was given but for the compassion and kindness that will echo in these families' lives long into the future.

**Custer County: (WestCliffe)** In Custer County, we are actively collaborating with multiple agencies to support our veteran community. Our partnerships include working with UAACOG and the Workforce Housing Committee to secure housing for veterans and teaming up with the local SBA and VBOC to provide vital support and resources for veteran entrepreneurs. Additionally, we work closely with Valley Strong to fundraise locally, helping ensure veterans receive the assistance they need.

**San Luis Valley: (Monte Vista)** In the San Luis Valley, we have established a sustainable Veteran Wraparound Service Center to provide comprehensive support for veterans. Our services include a weekly leather workshop, which offers a creative outlet and skill-building opportunities. Locally, we refer veterans to the area's Veteran Service Officer (VSO) for additional support. Additionally, we are relocating to the Care and Share Distribution Center, allowing us to enhance veterans' access to essential wraparound services throughout the San Luis Valley.

**Las Animas County: (Trinidad)** In Las Animas County, we've partnered with Mt. Carmel Wellness & Community Center, the Network Council at Trinidad State College, the American Legion, the Local Veterans Council, the local VSO and the regional VSO to provide veterans with comprehensive wraparound services. Our collaboration with the Workforce Center helps create employment opportunities for veterans, and we're exploring new connections with the local Elks Club. We're also coordinating with the CBOC in New Mexico to enhance cross-state veteran support. Additionally, we host a monthly coffee gathering to promote veteran services and strengthen community connections. ■



# Office Updates



## The Veterans Voice Project

The Veterans Voice is launching its new format in December. The show is now a resource based, journalistic-style video podcast catered to informing the veteran community of resources available to them, while sharing the story and emotional journey of the guest involved. Our recent guests include Benjamin Patton, grandson of WWII's General George S. Patton, John Bartlett MACV-SOG green beret, and Dr. Eric Abbot on the physiological side effects of loneliness.

To be a part of the community, find us on YouTube @[theveteransvoicepodcast](#). Look for the big V! See you all there. ■



## Volunteer Spotlight

Our Volunteer of the Month is James Herrington, an intern who works daily in the Development & Fundraising department. He dedicates his time to helping military members, veterans and their families by providing support and essential resources, assisting with veterans in crisis and providing outreach and volunteerism to our active-duty single soldier programs.

Originally from Texas, James has been living in Colorado for four years. He served 22 years in the Army and is currently transitioning into the civilian nonprofit sector.

James has been married for 15 years and has five children—ages 24, 14, 13, 11 and 9. In his free time, he enjoys sports, woodworking and family time. His commitment to service, both in his professional and personal life, makes him an invaluable part of our team at Mt. Carmel ■



## Community Outreach & Events

As we move into the winter months, you are invited to join us as we continue to engage the community. Please feel free to call or email us for more information:

- **January 9th - Salute to Heroes**
- **January 25th - Hoedown for Heroes**
- **March 15th - St. Patrick's Day Parade**

**Call: (719) 772-7000**

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