



# A Beacon of Support

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*By Bob McLaughlin, Executive Director*

**W**elcome to 2024!

As we start the new year, Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center is busier than ever and continues to provide wraparound services to military members, veterans, and their families.

In our uncertain world, Mt. Carmel has been called on to serve greater numbers of those who served our nation. We ended 2023 on a high note, and here are some of our major accomplishments for the year.

- Our Transition and Employment Team has provided counseling and assistance to more than 4,000 people since Mt. Carmel began. The goal is to help veterans from all eras, transitioning military, and their families to find work.

- The Colorado Veterans Business Outreach Center opened in Colorado Springs. The statewide outreach group is part of the Small Business Administration and is designed to help veterans, transitioning military, and their family members create new businesses. To date, the VBOC has more than 247 clients and is working on a series of programs to aid entrepreneurs, such as mental health and wellness, equity in business, rural farmers and ranchers business workshops, and more.

- We hosted our first Resilience and Wellness seminar, a daylong event full of expert advice, panel discussions, and vendors available to help military members and veterans alike find greater resilience in the face of difficult times.

- Mt. Carmel partner Next Chapter also reached a big milestone. In the legislation that created the behavioral health group, the goal was to reach 636 veterans in three years. Thanks to outreach efforts, Next Chapter surpassed that goal only 18 months after its inception, highlighting the great need for resources for our local veterans.

- Military and Family Veteran Services continues to meet demand with biweekly food drives for families, as well as providing rental assistance, access to basic resources and support for local families.

- Mt. Carmel created new services in rural and Southern Colorado as well. We opened locations in Westcliffe and Trinidad. Our partner, Next Chapter, expanded to Pueblo to continue to support rural veterans in need.



Bob McLaughlin

- We expanded partnerships in Pueblo and now offer a variety of support programs, such as equine therapy, art therapy, yoga, tai-chi, and acupuncture.

- Along the way, we had some fun. We welcomed celebrity chef Robert Irvine to Colorado Springs for Patriot Day, and Hoedown for Heroes brought in veteran Nate Boyer, a former Green Beret, football player and actor to our stage.

Mt. Carmel provides low-barrier services to veterans of all eras, regardless of type of discharge or time in service. Our steadfast goal is to help those who serve as they fight different kinds of battles – for basic needs, for mental health, for their families.

As always, we remain grateful to those who support our mission to help Southern Colorado veterans with a hand-up, not a hand-out. And we are asking that you continue that support – through financial donations, volunteering, or in-kind assistance for basic food and resource needs. Help us serve those who serve our nation. Provide support, provide hope, save a life. Go to [veteranscenter.org](http://veteranscenter.org) for more information. ■

**Bob McLaughlin**  
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*Bob McLaughlin*



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## Partner Spotlight

A long-standing partnership with Rocky Mountain Veterans Advocacy Project is expanding this year as it now offers family law and estate planning services, in addition to discharge upgrades and VA benefit appeals.

The pro bono and low-fee legal service is offered to veterans, service members, dependents and surviving spouses, and it uses experiential learning for future attorneys working under experienced attorneys.

Starting in January, the Rocky Mountain Veterans Advocacy Project is offering weekly sessions every Friday. Individuals can schedule virtual sessions on the first, second and third Friday of every month, and in-person sessions at the Colorado Springs office the fourth Friday of the month. Virtual sessions can be conducted at Mt. Carmel VSC, at either the Colorado

Spring or Pueblo offices, or any location with Zoom access. Implementing virtual sessions allows expansion to rural areas, including our growing footprint in Southern Colorado.

Schedule sessions by calling either the Colorado Springs or Pueblo offices at 719-772-7000 and 719-309-4719, respectively. ■



# Department Updates



## Transition and Employment

T&E is steadily plugging away as we have continuously increased our outreach and briefings. As always, we are focused on helping our military, veterans, spouses, and dependents find meaningful work. In the past year, our team achieved over 4,000 placements for the life of the program! **Congratulations go out to current, past and**

**future Peer Navigators! The team has worked extremely hard to take care of our clients. The LINK interview workshop has been a great success. Josh Willis in the Pueblo office has been doing great things.** To our partners, thank you so much for the continued support. We are looking forward to another successful year! ■



## Military, Veteran, and Family Services

**MVFS is in the beginning stages of planning the Stand Down and Transitional Housing Initiative 2024. In addition to these events, we are actively involved in the planning stages of the El Paso County Built for Zero initiative, a national movement to measurably end homelessness.**

We have been fortunate to receive regular donations from Amazon that include food/pantry items, hygiene products, bedding, phone cases, and outdoor items. It's always a surprise, but we are grateful and excited each time we pick up donations. We have been awarded another year of the Emergency Solutions Grant for 2024-2025, which will allow us to continue to support the most vulnerable people at risk of homelessness or currently unhoused to help get them into stable housing. ■



## Greet & Connect

**Justin Verhulst is getting into the groove as our new operations manager with the Greet & Connect Team. We are currently coordinating with the Apricot Team to upgrade the level of support we receive to ensure maximum effectiveness.**

We are conducting internal security readiness training and briefings for the safety of our entire team. In addition, we established and briefed an emergency response plan. ■

# Department Updates



## Health and Wellness

We welcomed our new spring interns and completed an Internal Family Systems Immersion course. We have locked in our Welcome Home Warrior and Silver Cliff retreats for April. **We were so grateful for a grant from Colorado Springs Health Foundation that provided an outside consulting agency to help us identify our Behavioral Health program strengths and areas of growth to increase efficiency**

**and efficacy. We completed the leg work for this Metamorphosis Project, and we look forward to the final presentation of results.** We now have yoga classes on Sundays, and we are solidifying our 2024 Art Expressions programming. We had our quarterly partner meeting, and Kirsten celebrated her seven-year anniversary with Mt. Carmel! ■



## Next Chapter

Next Chapter has continued service connection for our veterans and their families. **Since the expansion to Pueblo, over 700 veterans and family members have been connected to resources within our coverage area. We've blasted through our three-year goal in just over a year and a half since our inception.**

Next Chapter teammates attended the Face the Fight Coalition launch meeting with USAA and are actively participating

with the coalition. The Face the Fight Coalition mission is to reduce the stigma surrounding suicide within the military community through collaborative efforts with numerous veteran-focused organizations nationwide.

In the last months of 2023, Next Chapter attended a plethora of events. As 2024 rolls out, Next Chapter is preparing for moving, events, and more clients served! ■



## VBOC

As the Colorado Veterans Business Outreach Center at Mt. Carmel heads into its first winter season, the active client roster resides at 247, with 357 counseling sessions and 27 training events. The Colorado VBOC will continue to provide business counseling sessions during regular business hours and on nights and weekends. The VBOC hosted events during National Veterans Small Business Week that included the Southern Colorado Rural Resource Forum, Introduction to Entrepreneurship at UCCS, Boots to Business Reboot, and a VetCert Workshop.

**The Colorado VBOC has completed 14 Boots to Business classes since May 1, 2023. This included hosting the first Military Spouse Pathway to Business on November 29, 2023. As we continue into the winter, the Colorado VBOC will be hosting a Boots to Business Reboot with the Loveland VA, Larimer County SBDC, and Colorado APEX Accelerator.**

The Colorado VBOC has been focused on identifying gaps in service for veteran-owned small businesses. One in seven franchises are veteran-owned. During December 2023, the Colorado VBOC has rebranded the Franchising with Veterans Workshop and will be hosting it at Dart Wars North. Additional veteran small-business programs are being launched, which include an Equity Symposium for Veterans in Business, an Access to Capital Series with Lender Showcase, and the expansion of the Introduction to Entrepreneurship Workshop into more colleges and universities throughout the state.

The Colorado VBOC staff are regularly attending outreach events to educate the community, organizations, and businesses about Colorado VBOC programs and services. These include VetNet, ACHIEVE, COSSBA, Heartland Connect, and Catalyst Campus networking opportunities. ■



## Southern Colorado

### Power of Partnerships

By strengthening our partnerships with local and national organizations, we linked clients to a full array of resources to begin new chapters in their lives. Partner relationships are integral to continued social impact as we support veterans and their family members.

Since its inception, Mt. Carmel has grown to become a beacon of support within the community, delivering integrated programs and supporting creative partnerships that make a lasting difference in the lives of local military, veterans, and their families.

Our robust community outreach called for renewed and expanded partner relationships. We have increased our partner base with recent national and local alliances, which affords our clients more impactful resources, support, and program opportunities

As Mt. Carmel looks ahead toward the remainder of 2024, we remain committed to our mission of providing best practices in service to our military community. Our accessible programs, integrated resources, and collaborative partnerships empower lives and strengthen our community.



### Creating more opportunities for veterans by expanding services

Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center continues to sustain its services in 2024 for veterans of any era, with any type of discharge, regardless of time in service. Mt. Carmel provides wraparound support for transition and employment, behavioral health and wellness, family assistance and help with basic needs.

We are working with local and statewide groups to provide more therapeutic services and additional basic-need assistance in 2024. Mt Carmel will host or offer services at the Pueblo location at 1925 E. Orman St.

To start, on January 22, Intellitec College will provide 15-minute chair massages from 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at Mt. Carmel.

Mt. Carmel is also partnering with Helping Hands at St. Mary Corwin Hospital, 1008 Minnequa Ave.

We are hosting the Helping Hands Pueblo

Community Coalition, a group of local organizations and nonprofits that support residents (not just veterans) in leading healthier lives, on a monthly basis.

Veterans and others can pick up food boxes, gain connections to free and low-cost medical care onsite, receive resources to navigate Medicare and Medicaid, as well as other support available. The monthly event starts at 10 a.m. on every first Wednesday and lasts until supplies are depleted.

Additionally, the Sangre De Cristo Arts Center is working with Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center to offer art classes from 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. every Saturday. The Art Expression courses are free and open to veterans or family members over the age of 18. The courses are meant to help explore emotions, develop self-awareness and provide a positive experience in a safe and healthy environment.



# Office Updates

## Other programs available this year also include:

- **Rocky Mountain Veterans Advocacy Program** will be offering legal assistance from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. every Friday at Mt. Carmel.
- **Veterans can receive free eye exams and free glasses** through the EyeLove Care organization at Mt. Carmel. Using Medicaid, Medicare or Department of Veterans Affairs benefits, the organization provides exams and glasses. Additional services, like contact lenses or frames, are extra. For veterans without insurance or those ineligible for VA benefits, exams are \$79.
- **Intellitec College offers free, 60-minute massages** to veterans at 3673 Parker Road. The massages are available from 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. every Monday-Thursday. The sessions last for 45 minutes.



- **Working with Southern Colorado AHEC and the National Association of Hispanic Nurses, Mt. Carmel will offer Five-Point Acudetox.** It is a five-needle acupuncture treatment to the ear that helps with anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, trauma, mental health and resilience. The treatment can help reduce sleep problems, intrusive thoughts and nightmares.
- **Pueblo also offers Rejuevit Infrared sauna and biomat therapy** available for the therapeutic needs of veterans. These treatments can help with pain management, improved sleep, stress reduction, joint mobility, and improved circulation.

In Trinidad, we have partnered with Sister Blandina's Jewelry and Gift Shop providing therapeutic bracelet- and necklace- making every third Tuesday of the month.

Westcliffe continues to grow its Veterans Connection Custer County team supporting the entire county with its quarterly meeting with the community, coming together supporting veterans.

Retreat: "Heal my Wounded Soul" will be Saturday, January 20th, 2024

For more information about any of these programs and more, visit [veteranscenter.org](http://veteranscenter.org) or call Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center at (719)309-4719. ■



## The Veterans Voice Project

**The Veterans Voice has welcomed a new team. Paul Watson has stepped in as host, alongside podcast coordinator and producer Angi Baker-Saunders and sound engineer Taylor Chapman.**

**Paul Watson retired from the Army and is a former Special Forces 10th Group warrant officer. Taylor Chapman also retired from the Army, and is a former Special Forces 10th Group medic. With their notable accomplishments and military distinction, Paul and Taylor bring a unique and focused approach to the Veterans Voice project with passion and purpose for helping our veteran and military-connected community.**

The new team has come to the project with fresh energy and creativity, aspiring to grow and expand the podcast to reach a new generation of veterans and develop a presence that captures a wider audience.

As these plans for growth and evolution are underway, the team is working together to ensure the project remains a dedicated part of Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center. As our new team brings

together new talent, new stories, and new partnerships, we are glad to maintain and honor our current partnerships and sponsorships as well.

As with seasons of change, the team has faced challenges. With persistence and perseverance, the team has taken time to resolve these challenges in order to ensure the long-term success of the Veterans Voice Project. The team is preparing to reintroduce departmental podcasts, partner spotlights, and other routine features that were paused for the initial onboarding period.

We are excited to see how Veterans Voice will support, engage, and amplify the mission and vision of Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center in 2024! ■

