



A Beacon of Support

April - May 2025 | Issue #54

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CHRISTIAN KEYS

By Bob McLaughlin, Executive Director

May is Military Appreciation Month! Memorial Day has just passed, where we honored those who gave the ultimate sacrifice.

We began this month with Small Business Week, and I was proud to present the Veteran Small Business Owner of the Year award to Hassan Campbell of Infinity Technology Services. Hassan is an Air Force veteran who is committed to giving back to his fellow veterans. He provides mentoring and coaching to veterans, while ensuring his company's hiring processes include ways to transfer military skills to real jobs. Hassan speaks at the Air Force Academy about entrepreneurship, participates in Mt. Carmel events, and has built four Habitat for Humanity houses for veterans.

Veterans often find their next mission in owning small businesses after leaving military service. Ownership gives them a chance to test their mettle in new ways, use the tenacity and discipline learned in the military, and contribute to their communities. That's why Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center believes in supporting veterans in their business journey just as they were supported during their military careers.

Mt. Carmel's commitment to veteran entrepreneurship extends far beyond supporting a single veteran. Mt. Carmel hosts the Colorado Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC) as part of our mission to support veterans across the entire state. VBOC conducts classes throughout Colorado and at local military installations to help military-affiliated members explore, plan, start, and grow their small businesses.

This month, VBOC celebrates two years of helping hundreds of business owners pursue their business dreams! Veterans aren't the only people eligible to get assistance from VBOC; military spouses, family members, National Guard members, and Reservists can take classes, gain access to resources, and learn from business experts as well.

I was honored to receive the Diamond Award from the Small Business Administration for Mt. Carmel's support of the small business. Thank you to the SBA for recognizing our enduring commitment to veterans and businesses.

Along with VBOC, Mt. Carmel also stands ready to support military members, veterans, and their families through our other core services: transition and employment, assistance with basic needs assistance, and health and wellness activities and counseling.

We continue to grow our programs including the Military and Veterans Family Services' Veterans Climb, which partners with the El Pomar Foundation to deliver long-term and intensive assistance to at-risk veterans through supportive services, personalized mentoring, career and technology education, employment preparation, and health and wellness coaching.

We also added a peer mentor team to support the 4th Judicial District. This group assists justice-involved veterans by helping create the structure for them to get back on their feet and into the workforce.



Bob McLaughlin

Mt. Carmel always seeks ways to support veterans and their journey. The Veteran Art Show this month at Cottonwood Gallery for the Arts showcased works created through the Society in Arts grant, a part of our mental health program. Art allows veterans to share their feelings without saying a word — and the pieces on display were a profound collection of their talents and experiences. We look forward to holding another art show in Pueblo in November.

Additionally, we held the Norwegian Ruck March in May, with over 450 participants strapping on 30 pounds and marching 18.6 miles, as well as a partner event for the Remount Foundation, an organization that provides equine therapy and support for veterans, active-duty military members, and their families.

Mt. Carmel works daily through our communities to provide the necessary tools and skills veterans need to thrive outside the military. We are honored to do the work we do, and we are proud to serve those who served.

As we end May with Memorial Day weekend, let us never forget those who made the ultimate sacrifice and their families. Take a moment this Memorial Day to remember those who died in pursuit of our collective freedom.

We're grateful to our supporters and partners who make this work possible and who help us deliver hope and save lives. Thank you for helping us continue our mission.

Bob McLaughlin ■

Bob McLaughlin
Colonel (Ref.), U.S. Army



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Partner Spotlight

The **Senior Resource Council (SRC)** has been a vital advocate for senior-serving professionals in the Pikes Peak region since 1988. Through their commitment to education, collaboration, and resource sharing, SRC empowers its members to deliver exceptional care and support to older adults in our community.

Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center is proud to have partnered with SRC for the past two years. Their dedication to service strongly aligns with our mission—especially in support of senior veterans.



One of SRC's signature events is the **Joe Henjum Senior Accolades**, named in honor of co-founder **Joe Henjum**, a retired Air Force veteran and local leader who helped shape SRC into what it is today. The awards celebrate professionals, volunteers, veterans, and organizations that go above and beyond to serve the senior community.

We were honored to be nominated this year in the **Large Nonprofit** category—a reflection of our ongoing collaboration and shared commitment to community impact.

For more information, contact **Jaime Wuilliez**, Vice President of the SRC Board, at 407-963-8204 or jaime@thebranchco.com. ■



Department Updates



Transition and Employment

Amazon was on site May 13 for an industry day hiring event.

LINK had another seminar on May 14 and 15.

Border Patrol was on site May 23 for another resumé and application

workshop. This was the last event with Richard Santos as he will be moving to the Border Patrol Academy this summer.

Our first Education and Training Fair was May 28th. ■



Military, Veteran, and Family Services

MVFS is actively working to plan the 2025 Stand Down/THI. We have started ordering DRMO, conducting initial inventory, and compiling partners for this year's event. We have been very fortunate to receive Support for Stand Down from Weidner Apartments for the next three years to ensure the continued success of these events.

Vet Climb has officially rolled out. We have transitioned Glen Cooper (former Client Care Coordinator) and Christian Keys (intern) to Vet Climb Peer Mentor positions. They will be actively working with the

Fourth Judicial District Court to support high-needs/high-risk justice involved veterans involved in the Veterans Treatment Court to see successful completion of the program.

We continue to see a high demand in our pantry/hope closet program. There is an increased number of individuals and families who are in need of basic food items and hygiene products. We are working to find a better way to manage the items to support more people more effectively. ■



Greet & Connect

The Greet & Connect team has kicked spring off with a fresh look around the lobby of Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center! Thanks to the incredible support from the volunteer group at Sam's Club, who helped us paint our walls, we've created a welcoming space for our veterans and visitors.

We also want to extend a huge thank you to the Keller Williams Red Team for their generous efforts in collecting food for our distribution program and pantry. Your commitment helps us continue to serve those who have served us.

Additionally, the G&C and Partner Relations teams have joined forces to welcome two new groups into the Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center

community. We're excited to now host a dedicated recovery group, as well as a chapter of the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA), expanding our support network for veterans and their families. These additions reflect our continued commitment to holistic care and community connection.

Reminder: We have event space available for rent at Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center. Whether it's a birthday party, baby shower, graduation celebration, or an office event, our versatile venue is ready to accommodate all needs. For more information, to book one of our rooms or for a walkthrough of our facility, please contact our front desk at 719-772-7000. ■

Department Updates



Health and Wellness

We hosted our 2 couples retreats and had a wonderful rejuvenating time together. 16 couples rated it highly satisfactory and the majority increased connection with one another at the retreats.

Thanks to the gracious Arts in Society grant, we hosted our Veterans' Art Exhibit and the art was stunning and moving! Seeing art from our Military community is very impactful. We hope to have another Art Exhibit in Fall, 2025.

We are partnering with Shaman's Way Dog Training and will have classes soon.

We had 4 of our graduate interns graduate in May! Congratulations! Also, we are looking to increase our team and bring on some full-time behavioral health counselors!

Finally, Kirsten will remain as acting BH Director. She is excited to take the program in new and exiting directions. ■



Next Chapter

Our team has so many exciting things to celebrate this Spring! We congratulate Reina, our Pueblo representative, as she and her family welcomed their new daughter in April! Congratulations also goes to Jasmine who received an "It Starts with Me Champion" award in May for her efforts in suicide prevention! Our UHealth teammate, Leah, completed her Doctoral program and will be graduating this May!

In preparation for Sunset, Next Chapter focuses on ensuring the immediate needs of veterans and their families are met by continuing to offer resource navigation.

On May 1, 2025, team members attended the signing of House Bill (HB) 25-1132. We are pleased to announce that Governor Jared Polis has signed HB 25-1132, expanding the Veterans Mental Health Services Program. This legislation enhances community behavioral health programs, providing essential behavioral health services to service members, Veterans, and their families. Next Chapter is dedicated to working collaboratively with the State to define and fulfill our role in this important initiative. ■



VBOC

The Colorado VBOC Marks 2nd Anniversary and Surpasses 800 Clients Served

In May, the Colorado Veterans Business Outreach Center (CO VBOC) proudly celebrated its second anniversary. This important milestone coincides with another major achievement, surpassing 800 clients served. In April and May alone, we facilitated over 175 meaningful client engagements and provided more than 60 hours of personalized business counseling.

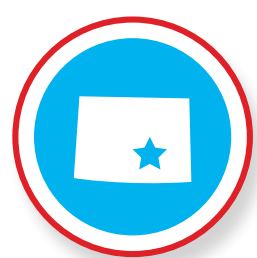
Our programming and outreach efforts continue to thrive. Over the past two months, Colorado VBOC hosted three Boots to Business sessions, one Boots to Business | Reboot, and a series of workshops, including a dedicated program for military spouses exploring business ownership. We were also honored to participate in the El Paso County Commissioners Proclamation Day and to serve as an exhibitor at the 13th Annual Southwest Colorado Small Business Conference in Durango.

We remain focused on expanding our impact by strengthening partnerships with resource organizations and subject-matter experts. These collaborations allow us to provide high-quality referrals, joint workshops, and customized support to veteran and military-connected entrepreneurs across the state.

As we begin the first quarter of a new fiscal year, our team is hitting the road—meeting with partners and stakeholders across Colorado. A top priority for the year ahead is to connect quarterly with each of the state's 13 Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs). We're off to a strong start, with two productive visits already completed to the Western Slope.

Looking ahead, we are excited to continue empowering veterans, military spouses, and entrepreneurs on their business journeys. Thank you for being a part of our mission.

Stay connected for more updates and opportunities from the Colorado VBOC! ■



Southern Colorado

Driving Impact, Deepening Roots, and Expanding Access for Veterans in Southern Colorado

Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center continues to lead transformative efforts across Southern Colorado, expanding our reach and impact in communities like the San Luis Valley, Las Animas, and Custer counties. Our mission remains clear: to deliver life-changing support to veterans and their families—wherever they are.

We recently celebrated a successful Casino Night Fundraiser in Alamosa, bringing together local supporters to raise funds and awareness for veteran services in the region. In Custer County, we proudly welcomed Keith Hall as our new Veteran Liaison. Keith has hit the ground running—building strong community relationships, identifying gaps in services, and strengthening our presence in this vital rural area. Meanwhile, in Trinidad, our team continues to provide robust outreach, equipping veterans with the tools and resources needed to thrive.

We've also deepened our engagement in higher education, launching monthly on-campus veteran resource events at Adams State University and Alamosa College. These efforts are part of our commitment to meeting veterans where they are—whether in the classroom, transitioning from service, or building new lives in rural communities.

Across the region, we're working alongside local Veteran Service Officers (VSOs) to provide truly wraparound support. Services include:

- Employment assistance
- Legal guidance

- Behavioral health counseling
- Emergency financial aid

Our partnership with United Way continues to open doors to veteran-focused tax services and financial coaching—empowering veterans with knowledge and tools for long-term stability.

Through our collaboration with the Care and Share Food Bank for Southern Colorado, we've helped serve thousands of community members—15% of whom are veterans—ensuring no family goes hungry. We've also expanded pantry access and increased meat donations throughout the region.

We're committed to long-term sustainability, actively pursuing funding at all levels of government to secure the future of veteran services. As we continue working toward a permanent home for the Southern Colorado Region One Source Center in Pueblo, we're laying the foundation for a centralized hub that will deliver consistent, comprehensive care for years to come.

This year, we've hosted community roundtables in Westcliffe and Trinidad, bringing together more than 30 organizations to collaborate on local solutions. We've also launched free vaccination clinics and distributed our new Rural Colorado Access to Care flyer, now in circulation across multiple counties—further connecting veterans to critical services.

At Mt. Carmel, we're proud to be a trusted partner in healing, connecting, and empowering our Southern Colorado military and veteran communities—one relationship at a time. ■

Volunteer Spotlight: Don Spano



This month, we are honored to recognize Don Spano as our Volunteer of the Month. Don's unwavering dedication to serving veterans and seniors across multiple organizations exemplifies the spirit of community service.

As a chaplain for five organizations—including VFW Post #7829, Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center, Silver Key of Colorado Springs, All Veterans Funeral Service, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day

Saints—Don provides spiritual guidance, counseling, and support to countless individuals.

At Mt. Carmel, Don ministers to staff and clients, offers spiritual counseling in support of our behavioral health division, and plays a pivotal role in events such as the annual Stand Down and Patriot Day Celebration. He also chairs our quarterly Spiritual Wellness Partners Meeting, fostering collaboration among community partners.

Don's commitment extends beyond Mt. Carmel. He conducts hospital and home visits for VFW members, participates in food distribution efforts, supports end-of-life planning initiatives, and volunteers with Silver Key's Meals on Wheels program.

His compassionate service touches the lives of many, making him an invaluable asset to our community. Thank you, Don, for your selfless dedication and the profound impact you make every day. ■



Westcliffe - Custer County



With the support and mentorship of the Southern Colorado Director, my first month on the job has been nothing short of inspirational. In a short time, I have become a powerful force for good in Custer County—working hand-in-hand with the County Veterans Service Officer to

deliver meaningful, wraparound services that are making a real difference in the lives of local veterans and their families.

This renewed momentum is already evident as the Westcliffe office of Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center gears up to host the 2nd Annual Wet Mountain Veterans Tribune & Silent Auction on September 6, 2025. This event is not just about fundraising—it's about strengthening the heart of the community.

Together with local businesses, nonprofits, and community leaders, we're gathering exciting auction items and services to benefit those who have served. All proceeds will go directly toward supporting veterans and their families in Custer County—ensuring they have access to vital resources, care, and support.

We invite everyone to join us: donate, participate, and be part of something truly impactful. Let's come together to honor our veterans and build a stronger, more connected Custer County. ■



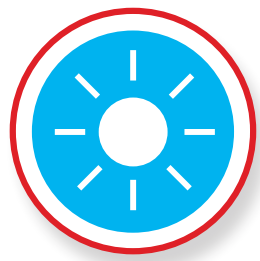
Alamosa - San Luis Valley



The Alamosa building for Mt. Carmel Veterans Services has quickly become a cornerstone for veteran support in the San Luis Valley. Its success was highlighted during our inaugural event, Casino Night, which brought together approximately 100 attendees for an evening of entertainment, camaraderie, and fundraising. Thanks to strong

community turnout and the generosity of local sponsors and donors, we raised a substantial amount of money to support our ongoing programs and assist veterans in need. The event not only demonstrated the viability of hosting engaging, veteran-focused events in rural Colorado, but also strengthened relationships with key community partners eager to support the mission.

While Valley Veteran Recreation (VVR) has officially dissolved due to internal challenges, a new nonprofit—The Fox Hole Project—has emerged to carry forward and expand the VVR mission. The Fox Hole Project aims to create a safe and supportive environment for veterans to connect through recreational therapy, community engagement, and mental health awareness. Its mission is to provide healing and purpose through structured events and peer-led activities that address the isolation and disconnect many veterans face. With the continued support of the Alamosa building and Mt. Carmel's services, The Fox Hole Project is poised to become a driving force in the next chapter of veteran support in the San Luis Valley. ■



Pueblo – Pueblo County



Sal Katz Jr, Laurie Collins, Josh Wills and Amy Koehn

At Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center in Pueblo, we are committed to improving the lives of the veterans and families who have given so much to our nation. As we move through the spring and summer seasons, we're creating meaningful partnerships, compassionate outreach, and sharing the powerful stories of our veterans.

A major highlight this season is our upcoming Pars for Patriots Golf Charity, taking place on June 13 at the Pueblo Country Club. Every dollar raised directly supports the wraparound services that help our veterans heal, grow, and thrive. We hope you'll join us on the course or by spreading the word to others who want to support Mt. Carmel and local veterans.

We're also thrilled to be partnering with the Colorado State Fair to present "Honoring Veterans Weekend," a tribute to the service and sacrifice of our local heroes. Veterans have deep roots in our community, and the celebration at the State Fair is an opportunity to show our support.

Art continues to be a powerful tool for healing, and we're proud to continue our Arts Expression Program in partnership with the Sangre de Cristo Arts Center. Veterans are discovering new ways to express their stories through art. In that same spirit, we're exploring a new initiative—our Veterans Music Therapy Program—which will use the power of music and connection to support emotional well-being and build community.

We're also bringing fresh energy to the Mt. Carmel Ambassador Program this season. If you want to serve others and spread the word about Mt. Carmel's mission, we invite you to join this growing team of local leaders.

This summer, you'll find us at the Pueblo Chile Festival, and we're hosting our 3rd Annual Veterans Community Update, where we'll connect with partners and discuss the future.

Gratitude is stitched into every act of service at Mt. Carmel—and nowhere is that more visible than with our Mt. Carmel Quilters. These generous volunteers create handmade quilts for veterans touched by war. Each quilt is more than warmth—it's a tangible expression of love, respect, and healing.

We also want to thank Josh Wills, our dedicated Transition and Employment Peer Navigator. Josh has attended every job fair in Pueblo County, helping veterans find employment opportunities and career pathways. His commitment ensures that no veteran goes without support as they transition from the military.

Our mission comes to life in the personal stories we witness every day. One Vietnam veteran, living with complications from Agent Orange exposure and struggling with mobility, reached out to us. We provided a new walker, partnered with the Pueblo County VSO, arranged in-home support, and connected him with food and Medicare assistance. A single mother and U.S. Army veteran facing car trouble and food insecurity was referred to us. Thanks to our network of partners, we were able to repair her vehicle, assist with her resumé, and provide her and her child with the support they needed.

As part of our growing community, we invite you to take part in our monthly challenges. In May, you can support Pars for Patriots by volunteering, donating, or simply sharing our mission with others. In June, help us grow by becoming a Mt. Carmel Ambassador.

Finally, we had some incredible events! In May, we hosted the Veterans Art Exhibit in Colorado Springs, the Pueblo VSO Resource Fair, and the Pueblo West American Legion Fair. In June, join us for Women Veterans Recognition Day, the Pars for Patriots Golf Charity, and the U.S. Senior Open at the Broadmoor, where Mt. Carmel will host a Military Outpost.

From Pueblo to the plains, we are united by a single purpose: to honor and uplift those who served. Thank you for standing with us. Together, we are building a more compassionate Southern Colorado—one veteran, one family, and one act of kindness at a time. ■



Trinidad - Las Animas County



At Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center in Trinidad, we recently witnessed the direct impact our services have for veterans in need. March marked my one-year anniversary here at Mt. Carmel. The year has been both fun and challenging. We've built strong partnerships, but at the same time, we are a beacon of support for veterans and families of Las Animas County. Nothing speaks louder about the impact on local community than data that shows growth in number of veterans served by our food pantry. During the past two months of March and April, we

served 38 veterans and family members, a tremendous 375% increase served for the same period in 2024. We did see an increase in the following months of 2024 due to the increased awareness, and we are committed to increased growth and community impact as we move deeper in 2025. Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center in Trinidad remains committed to serving veterans in Las Animas County through collaboration with multiple local agencies. We have built momentum over the past few months by providing vital services such as art therapy, assistance with food insecurity, and financial support to veterans and families in need. In addition to these services, we look forward to new partnerships like recently connected Medicare Mentors. Because aging veterans make up most of our client base, the partnership will provide critical information about the Medicare system and how it can work best with VA healthcare system.

The addition of a VA work-study student to the office increased access for clients and opened outreach opportunities as well. The additional help provided more support for clients, but also an opportunity to connect with more than 60 veteran students at Trinidad State College. We are excited to announce this partnership will be renewed for the fall semester. We'll also continue the new monthly outreach efforts. The focus during the next few months will be on promoting the inaugural Military Appreciation fundraiser event with Mt. Carmel Wellness & Community Center at the end of August, selling both sponsorships and tickets. ■



The Veterans Voice Project



As the voice of "Veterans Voice," Taylor Chapman is continuing his mission to help fellow veterans access to resources, reduce the stigma of asking for assistance, and provide a platform for veteran and military stories.

Since Chapman took over the podcast, Veterans Voice has grown its audience exponentially. He oversees a partnership with KOAA that includes airing a video of each podcast on the station's website and YouTube. He now reaches more than 15,000 people around the world, with an audience concentrated in Colorado.

His international listeners are in Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Germany. Within the U.S., he connects with veterans not only in Denver and Colorado Springs, but also in Los Angeles, Seattle, New York, Reno, and Houston.

He shares stories about veteran programs like those offered at Mt. Carmel, as well as philosophical episodes about peace and war. His guests include professors at UCCS, behavioral health counselors, veteran organizations, veteran-owned businesses and more.

"I was struggling when I found Mt. Carmel," he said, "and I found it through Veterans Voice. They asked me to come in and run the soundboard, and I was happy to help. Afterward, they took me to meet Bob and Paul. When I found out what great things Mt. Carmel does to help veterans, I had to be a part of it."

His favorite stories are those that explore emotions and personal stories, with no set agenda.

"I like just having conversations with people, and seeing where that conversation takes us," he said. "There are universal themes everyone can understand: loss, grief, love. It helps just to open up to each other, and then people listening understand they aren't alone. That's really what I try to create."

Chapman is a veteran himself, a Special Forces medic who retired recently from the U.S. Army. His military experiences inform his vision for Veterans Voice. ■

Partner Relations



What a great start to the new fiscal year! April marked the beginning of our fiscal year, and we're excited to share the strong momentum we've already built.



We proudly welcomed 15 new partners in April, including 7 new partners who will be tabling in our lobby to engage directly with the veteran community. We also launched 2 new in-house

dog training classes, expanding the wellness and support options available on-site. And there's much more to come in May!

On April 15, we hosted a successful Ambassador Social with over 25 attendees, creating an energizing space for collaboration. We also welcomed eight new community Ambassadors. We're thrilled to have them on board!

We're also honored to share that our long-standing partner, Peaks & Pours, has named Mt. Carmel VSC as their Charity of Choice for Peaks & Pours 2025—marking the third time they've chosen us for this recognition. We're incredibly grateful for their continued support and belief in our mission.

We've geared up for our Quarterly MVFS Program-Specific Partners Meeting on May 27, where we continued strengthening our partnerships and sharing program-specific updates.

Thank you to all our partners and ambassadors for your continued dedication and support. Let's keep the momentum going!

If you're interested in exploring new ways to collaborate, feel free to reach out to Partner Relations Coordinator Abbi Gregory at agregory@mtcarmelcenter.org. ■



Community Outreach

We have several outreach events coming up: • **Pars For Patriots – June 13, 2025** • **US Senior Open- June 25-29, 2025**