



A Beacon of Support

August - September 2025 | Issue #56

IN MEMORY OF
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VETERANS CLIMB:

CHRISTIAN KEYS
GLEN COOPER

By Bob McLaughlin, Executive Director

Service and sacrifice have been at the forefront of the minds of the team here at Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center. In September, our team hosted the 10th annual Patriot Day Give Back. During this event, we were able to connect service members, first responders, and families not only with food, but also helping to connect with various Mt. Carmel partners to learn about the resources available to them.

This year's opening ceremony for the Patriot Day Giveback was especially poignant with the tragedies that took place earlier that week in September. As our Guest Speaker Mayor Yemi stated, "The event serves as a time to pause and recognize the service and sacrifice made by not only our military members, but also our first responders". Congressman Crank echoed the importance of a community working together to make life better for all.

The men and women recognized at Patriot Day are the true champions. When it comes to the topic of what a champion, our late founder, Jay Cimino, said it best.

"A Champion is not perfect, but an ordinary person who inspires others to be the best they can be. A Champion is one who puts others first in the journey to win. A Champion prioritizes vision and passion and connects with people to lead fairly by treating everyone with respect and with a clear set of objectives."

Not only did the heroics of those individuals on 9/11 inspire all of us, but so did the actions of the countless men and women who have and continue to selflessly say "yes" in the face of danger to protect the daily freedoms that we all rely on day in and day out.

In August, Mt. Carmel was thrilled to participate along with hundreds of volunteers from the Home Depot Foundation to say thank you to the residents of Freedom Springs veterans housing facility. This made a major impact on not just the



Bob McLaughlin

veterans who call the Freedom Springs facility home, but also their families and loved ones.

Our next opportunity to provide a hand-up to veterans will be the Homeless Veterans Stand Down, which will take place on October 21 beginning at 9:00 a.m. at Switchback Stadium. For those of us who have not witnessed this powerful and impactful way to make sure that our brothers and sisters in arms have access to the supplies, services, and resources they so desperately need, especially with the winter months approaching.

This is just one of the many ways that Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center is continuing to support those who have served and sacrificed while wearing the uniform of our great nation.

Thank you for being part of our team.

Bob McLaughlin ■



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Partner Spotlight

Deloitte.

At Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center, we are proud to spotlight one of our long-standing and deeply valued partners — Deloitte. For over four years, Deloitte has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to our mission and the veteran community through consistent, heartfelt engagement and support.

Deloitte has been a key contributor to several of our major initiatives year after year, including Hoedown for Heroes and Patriot Day, helping make these cornerstone events both successful and memorable. Their dedication goes beyond event participation, they have included Mt. Carmel VSC in their organization-

wide day of service, encouraging employees across the company to give back and connect with community nonprofits like ours.

We are incredibly thankful for this meaningful and enduring partnership. The team at Deloitte continues to show up, serve, and make a difference, not just once, but consistently, with compassion and purpose. Their support strengthens our programs and amplifies our impact, and we are honored to work alongside such a committed partner in service to those who have served.

Thank you, Deloitte, for being a vital part of the Mt. Carmel family. ■

Department Updates



Transition and Employment

Our LINK seminar in September had 4 students attend and the networking event held afterwards sprouted up with 24 in attendance. Moving towards the end of the year, we have one last LINK course on November 19 & 20 to wrap up 2025.

Our new VIP Peer Navigator, Ana Gomez, starts on October 1 and has

both attended the most recent LINK course as well as the networking event in preparation for her new role.

Preparing for our final hiring event of 2025 on October 29, we have been averaging 33 employers and 120 job seekers come through the door, over our last three hiring events. ■



Military, Veteran, and Family Services

MVFS is in full prep mode for the 2025 Homeless Veterans Stand Down. We have conducted our final community partner meeting for Stand Down and are anticipating at least 58 partners/tables. We have secured several sponsors for the event and are grateful to have their support to make this possible. The posters and handbills have started circulating in the community.

MVFS has successfully reengaged with Amazon for donations. As times

are increasingly tough, we have seen a sharp increase in our pantry visits and our supplies are not lasting as long as a result. Securing these donations will have a positive impact on our clients.

MVFS has completed our last community partner meeting of the year. Habitat for Humanity (critical home repair and home buying programs) as well as Fountain View Rehab presented. Our next partner meeting will be in January of the new year. ■



Greet & Connect

At Mt. Carmel, our Greet & Connect team is here to ensure every visitor finds the help they need. We're the first point of contact for military, veterans, and their families, ready to guide you to the right resources, whether they're here in our building or out in the community through our extensive network of partners. We also want to remind you that we have dedicated Lobby Partners who hold regular outreach hours right here in our lobby. You're always welcome to stop by, connect with these organizations, and get the support you deserve.

As we move into the fall and holiday seasons, the Greet & Connect team is excited to roll up our sleeves and play our part in making our

upcoming fundraising events a success. From welcoming guests with a warm smile to providing crucial behind-the-scenes support, we're ready to assist the entire Mt. Carmel team. These gatherings are a vital part of our mission, and we are proud to help connect with our community and ensure Mt. Carmel finishes the year strong.

Also, as a reminder, as we move into the fall and holiday season, event space is available for rent at Mt. Carmel for all occasions, from birthday parties, holiday parties, and baby showers to office gatherings and graduation celebrations. For availability, bookings, or a facility tour, please contact our front desk at 719-772-7000. ■

Department Updates



Health and Wellness

We held an Ikebana flower arranging class in August and had 11 attendees for this class. Ikebana flower arranging is the Japanese art of flower arrangement that emphasizes balance, minimalism, and symbolism through the strategic placement of plant materials like flowers, branches, and leaves.

2nd QPR training - (Question, Persuade, Refer) suicide prevention training for the community. As many of you know, keeping our Military community healthy and safe is our utmost priority. If you are interested in participating in this training, contact us and we can get you connected with other QPR trainings. We have also increased our no cost screening

spots weekly to ensure we can serve those in need quickly.

Our Behavioral Health team has participated in many community outreach events such as the Health and Fitness Expo, the Space Base Delta One Forge the Force Festival, and the 9th Annual Honoring the Brave Breakfast, and more.

Kirsten continued engagement with Lethal Means Safety and FFAST (Family FireArms Secure storage Training) creating policies and procedures to increase safety for our clients with access to lethal means. ■



Next Chapter

Next Chapter continues to make meaningful strides toward securing funding to sustain and expand its mission of supporting Veterans throughout our communities. In August, the team presented at City Hall on August 25 and with the 4th Judicial ROAC on August 27, advocating for continued investment in Veteran-focused programming.

Throughout September, Next Chapter remained active across the region, strengthening partnerships and community engagement. Highlights

include participation in the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Walk on September 6, the HOLD Work Group at Schriever Space Force Base, September 11, Patriot Day observances, and the Pueblo food distribution events held September 12–13.

These efforts reflect Next Chapter's ongoing commitment to collaboration, visibility, and impact in service of those who've served.

Next Chapter continues to collaborate with BHASOs to advance its mission. ■



VBOC

In August, we participated in the panel discussion for our Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans on "Community Entrepreneurship Ecosystems" at UCCS Downtown, to highlight for our veteran entrepreneurs the types of support they are likely to find in our community.

By September, we proudly surpassed 1,000 clients served, a milestone that reflects the continued demand for veteran-focused business support across the state. In August and September alone, we counseled and provided resources to 70 high-impact clients.

Our outreach and programming remain strong. Over the past two months, the Colorado VBOC has:

Hosted three Boots to Business sessions.

Attended the Fort Carson ACS Small Business Resource to connect small businesses, entrepreneurs, transitioning service members, military spouses, and others from surrounding military communities with essential resources, expert guidance, and valuable networking.

Co-hosted the SaaS - Software Product Development Sessions - Ideation & Communicating Vision to teach how to craft a SaaS idea and learn how to communicate it to developers using tools like developer briefs and no-code mockups.

Co-hosted the Boots to Business for Veteran Farmers and Ranchers to assist participants in understanding the steps, stages, and activities related to launching and growing a business as a post-military career.

Attended the AMBA Military Bank Summit 2025 at the Cheyenne Mountain Resort.

Attended the 9th Annual Honoring the Brave Breakfast at The Broadmoor International Center.

As we continue expanding our impact, partnerships remain at the core of our work. Collaborating with resource organizations and subject-matter experts allows us to provide high-quality referrals, co-host workshops, and offer customized support for Colorado's veteran and military-connected business community.

Looking ahead to the third quarter of our fiscal year, our team is actively meeting with partners and stakeholders across the state. A key priority for the year is to continue to connect quarterly with all 13 of Colorado's Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs). In addition, we plan to attend the Western Slope Start-up week in Durango, the week of October 6-10.

We remain committed to empowering veterans, military spouses, and entrepreneurs on their business journeys. ■



Southern Colorado

Southern Colorado Update – Serving Those Who Served: Southern Colorado Veteran Highlights

Over the past few months, Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center has expanded its impact across Southern Colorado, reaching veterans and families in the San Luis Valley, Wet Mountain Valley, Pueblo, and Las Animas County. Through strong partnerships, innovative programs, and unwavering commitment, we are ensuring that veterans and their families have access to the resources they need to thrive.

Across the region, our teams are delivering wraparound services that include food pantry support, behavioral health counseling, employment and housing assistance, legal and education resources, and peer navigation. Each office is building momentum, creating visibility, and forging connections that extend Mt. Carmel's mission—serving those who served—into every corner of Southern Colorado.

In Pueblo, more than 507 veterans and families were connected to life-changing resources in just the past two months. Our Helping Hands quarterly food distribution continues to serve over 800 community members, including 15% veterans, while our partnership with Southern Colorado Heroes Helping Heroes has delivered more than 900 food boxes across the region. Thanks to the tireless work of 22 Community Ambassadors, Pueblo continues to serve as the trusted hub for veteran services. Pueblo also partnered with the Colorado State Fair to honor six extraordinary veterans, with service spanning from World War II to Operation Enduring Freedom, bringing the community together to recognize courage, sacrifice, and legacy.

In Alamosa, our team strengthened partnerships with Adams State University to expand engagement with student veterans, while continuing to provide direct support through the food pantry and referrals to Mt. Carmel's comprehensive services. In Westcliffe, two initiatives with the Westcliffe Library are set to launch this fall: a suicide awareness campaign beginning in September 2025 and a veteran art class series running through February 2026. The VBOC will also host a ReBoot class on October 16 to support veteran entrepreneurs.

In Las Animas County, our Trinidad office is laying strong foundations for long-term support. While many organizations face program cuts, we

remain committed to serving the community through our food pantry and expanding resource networks. Awareness of our services is growing through active participation in city council meetings, food distributions, and American Legion gatherings. Partnerships with the County Veteran Service Officer and American Legion Post 11 are helping connect more veterans to care, while our arts and cooking classes, in collaboration with Mt. Carmel Wellness & Community Center, have been so successful they are already scheduled for expansion into 2026. Most importantly, we have changed lives. Recently, two homeless veterans came to us in crisis, including one who arrived with nothing but worn clothes and little hope. Working with the County VSO and the newly appointed Unhoused Coordinator, we secured immediate shelter at Fort Wootton, then connected him to a VA social worker in Denver, who provided a HUD-VASH voucher and short-term housing support. What began as desperation turned into a real pathway to stability. Looking forward, we are preparing to launch the Las Animas County Care and Share Mobile Food Pantry in October, a much-needed resource that has already received overwhelming community support.

From Alamosa to Westcliffe, Pueblo to Trinidad, Mt. Carmel's Southern Colorado offices are working as one to deliver wraparound care, strengthen community partnerships, and ensure every veteran and family feels supported, valued, and connected. Together, we are not just providing services—we are building a stronger, more resilient Southern Colorado for those who have served. ■



Picture of Pueblo Veterans Honored at the Colorado State Fair



Westcliffe - Custer County



We are confirmed with the Westcliffe Library for two upcoming initiatives: a suicide awareness campaign beginning in September 2025 and veteran art classes running from September 2025 through February 2026. In addition, the VBOC is scheduling a ReBoot class for October 16. The Westcliffe office remains focused on delivering impactful, wraparound services that honor veterans and strengthen the fabric of our community. ■



Alamosa – San Luis Valley



The Alamosa office continues to build connections and expand outreach within the San Luis Valley. Over the past two months, we maintained consistent communication with the Adams State University Veterans Representative in preparation for both the MVFS and T&E teams to visit campus and engage with student veterans. We also participated in community networking, including the LOR Foundation Happy Hour for Champions, strengthening ties with local partners and increasing awareness of available veteran resources. Although some scheduled outreach events were postponed, we remain committed to rescheduling and maintaining visibility within the college and broader community. The office continues to provide direct assistance to local veterans through the food pantry, clothing resources, and referrals to Mt. Carmel services, including behavioral health counseling, employment assistance,

housing support, legal guidance, education resources, and peer navigator case management. Looking ahead, the Alamosa office will remain focused on increasing office traffic and awareness of services, hosting and supporting veteran resource events in coordination with community partners, and continuing to identify gaps in services while building connections to better support veterans and their families throughout rural Colorado.

Overall, the Alamosa office continues to build momentum through sustained public engagement and strategic collaboration. As our visibility grows, we remain committed to demonstrating Mt. Carmel's mission — serving those who served — not just in Alamosa, but throughout Southern Colorado. ■



Trinidad - Las Animas County



Over the past few months, incredible progress has been made in strengthening the foundation of support for veterans and their families in Las Animas County, progress that will continue to grow for years to come. At a time when many organizations are facing cuts, the Las Animas County Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center remains steadfast in serving our community through our food pantry, trusted partnerships, and a growing network of resources.

Each month, we see a steady flow of families relying on our services, while also welcoming new faces through intakes. Awareness of Trinidad's Mt. Carmel office is expanding rapidly thanks to our regular presence at city council meetings, network council meetings, monthly Care and Share food distributions, and American Legion gatherings. Our strong partnerships with the County Veteran Service Officer and American Legion Post 11 have been instrumental in connecting more veterans to the care they deserve.

Our veterans arts and cooking classes, in collaboration with Mt. Carmel Wellness & Community Center, has been a resounding success. We're thrilled that this partnership will continue into the next year, with even bigger plans to expand programming that builds skills, wellness, and community.

Most importantly, lives are being changed. Recently, two homeless veterans — both struggling and without hope — found their way to us. One veteran arrived with worn clothing and little faith that anyone could help. Working together with the County VSO and the newly appointed Unhoused Coordinator, we secured him immediate shelter at Fort Wootton, then connected him to a VA social worker in Denver, who provided a HUD-VASH voucher and short-term housing support. What began as desperation has turned into a real pathway toward stability and hope.

Looking ahead, we are excited to launch the Las Animas County Care and Share Mobile Food Pantry on October 4. The response has already been overwhelmingly positive, and this much-needed resource will bring relief to countless families in our community.

Together, with our partners, supporters, and community, we are not only sustaining services, but expanding opportunities for veterans and families in Las Animas County to thrive. ■

Pueblo – Pueblo County

In just the past two months, our Pueblo office has connected over 507 veterans and their families to life-changing resources, everything from behavioral health and employment support to housing assistance and access to nutritious food. Every quarter, our Helping Hands food distribution brings together more than 800 community members, including 15% veterans. It's not just about the food — it's about building community, offering support, and creating a place where hope and connection thrive. We continue to partner with Southern Colorado Heroes Helping Heroes to deliver over 900 boxes of food, saying “thank you” to veterans across Southern Colorado and ensuring families have access to essential resources. We were also honored to collaborate with the Colorado State Fair to publicly recognize six remarkable veterans, with service spanning from World War II to Operation Enduring Freedom. Each veteran shared a story of courage, sacrifice, and dedication, and the community joined together to celebrate their service and express gratitude for the legacy they've left. Moments like these show the true power of community collaboration. When organizations, volunteers, and local partners come together, we can provide meaningful support, honor the service of our veterans, and strengthen the bonds within our community. Thanks to the tireless efforts of our 22 Community Ambassadors and countless partners, our Pueblo office continues to be the go-to hub for comprehensive veteran services. Together, we ensure that every veteran and their family feel seen, supported, and valued, building resilience and connection that touches lives far beyond the programs themselves.

MAKING AN IMPACT: Through strong partnerships and the dedication of our staff, the Pueblo office continues to make a real difference in the lives of veterans and their families. From August through September, our collaboration with the Care and Share Food Bank reached over 800 community members, with veterans making up 15% of those served. These efforts went beyond just providing food; they offered families a sense of stability, connection, and hope during challenging times. Our team also maintained access to critical resources, including meat donations, food pantry support, and financial guidance, helping families take meaningful steps toward self-sufficiency. By combining direct services with strategic community partnerships, we are not only meeting immediate needs but also building a stronger, more resilient network of support for veterans across Southern Colorado. Each interaction, each meal, and each guidance session reflect our commitment to ensuring that every veteran and their family feels valued, supported, and empowered.

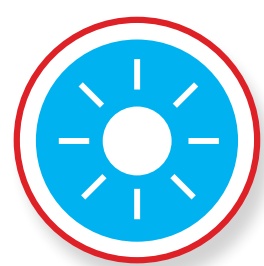
GOOD NEWS STORY: A local veteran family recently faced a sudden and significant challenge when the primary source of income was interrupted, leaving them at risk of falling behind on rent while caring for multiple children. The uncertainty of their situation created immense stress, and the family worried about maintaining stability in their home. Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center stepped in, providing critical support that covered urgent needs and offered the family much-needed peace of mind. With this assistance, they were able to regain stability and focus on moving forward, demonstrating how timely intervention can make a lasting difference in the lives of those who have served.

In another example, a veteran's spouse faced a complex process in accessing federal VA benefits. Through a coordinated effort between the Pueblo County Veterans Service Office, Mt. Carmel, and other community partners, the spouse received guidance and hands-on support to navigate applications, gather necessary documentation, and understand available resources. This collaboration ensured the spouse could access essential benefits, maintain financial stability, and feel supported throughout a challenging time.

These stories highlight the profound impact of community collaboration. By bringing together the expertise, resources, and dedication of multiple organizations, we are able to provide comprehensive, timely support that goes beyond individual programs. This partnership-driven approach not only addresses immediate needs but also fosters long-term resilience for veteran families, creating a stronger, more connected support network. When the community comes together in this way, veterans and their families feel valued, supported, and empowered, and the legacy of service is honored far beyond the battlefield.



Picture of September Helping Hands



Pueblo – Pueblo County (Continued)

Challenge:

Despite ongoing successes, the Pueblo Veteran Service Office continues to navigate challenges related to increasing demand for services and limited staffing capacity. Serving 13,000 individuals with just four on-site staff requires careful prioritization and coordination with community partners. We are actively working to streamline processes, expand volunteer engagement, and leverage collaborative programs to meet the growing needs of the veteran community efficiently.

UP AHEAD

October

- 1..... Pueblo Helping Hands Community Coalition
- 4..... Latino Legacy of Courage Award Ceremony
- 9..... Centennial High school Veterans Wall Rededication
- 10..... Pueblo Military Affairs Committee meeting
- 15..... Wyoming and Colorado Regional Job Fair
- 17..... McKinney Vento Resource Fair (D60)
- 24..... Pueblo Legal Resource Day - free “Ask an Attorney.”
- 28..... Pueblo’s Future is Better Together

November

- 5..... Pueblo Helping Hands Community Coalition
- 7..... Pueblo Military Affairs Committee meeting
- 8..... Pueblo Veterans Day Parade
- 11..... Central High School Veterans Day Ceremony
- 12..... Pueblo Veterans Community Update
- 13..... Pueblo Chamber Business during lunch
(Veterans Art Show & Lunch)
- 14..... Colorado Springs HOEDOWN

Note: The Pueblo Helping Hands Community Coalition with Care and Share takes place the first Wednesday of each month from 10 - 11 a.m. Veterans Arts Expression sessions are held every Saturday at 10 a.m. at the Sangre De Cristo Art Center. ■

Partner Relations

It’s been a busy few months, we hired two new employees to the team, Laura Cisneros and Alex McCabe.

Laura is the Donor and Partner Development Coordinator. She is married to an Army Veteran and brings some great experience and knowledge with her.

Alex is the Donor and Partner Specialist, he is an Army veteran and brings an impressive amount of knowledge in marketing and communications with him.

Please take the time to welcome both to the team.

In August we ran 4 Gold Hill Mesa concerts where we raised money and engaged with hundreds of people in the community. We also attended

the Salute to American Heroes motorcycle rally. We received several donations and spoke to countless veterans. We could not have done everything that we needed accomplish without the help of our volunteers

In September we hosted Patriot Day, were we had a great turnout and helped over 400 families. Our partners were instrumental in the success of this event because of their hard work and dedication.

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 the new Donor and Partner Development Coordinator Laura- lcisneros@mtcarmelcenter.org ■



The Veterans Voice Project



In This Season of Healing on The Veterans Voice: A journey through struggle, strength, and newfound purpose

Over the past two months, The Veterans Voice has continued to grow — not just in reach, but in depth. What began as a podcast rooted in veteran stories has evolved into a lens for examining the universal human experience: trauma and healing, war and peace, creativity and legacy. This stretch of episodes reminded us that no matter how different our backgrounds, there are threads of meaning that connect us all.

We began with Tyler Kindred, a filmmaker whose career has taken him from skateboarding in the streets of Orange County to capturing Beyoncé's Homecoming. Tyler's life has been a study in momentum, movement, and meaning. But it was his deeply personal film *Abbey Gate*, inspired by his wife's escape from Afghanistan, that grounded his cinematic talent in something sacred. Tyler offered us a powerful reflection on the role of the artist in today's noisy world: not merely to entertain, but to preserve truth, reframe pain, and bring clarity to chaos. His story reminded us that art is not just output, it's purpose.

Next, we returned to a familiar but ever-powerful voice: Ret. Colonel Bob McLaughlin. A recurring guest and mentor to our mission, Bob

reminded us that service does not end with the uniform. His work leading Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center reflects a deeper ethos — the warrior's calling to continue showing up for others long after the battlefield goes quiet. Through Bob's words, we explored the identity of the "Soldier for Life," and the profound truth that healing — both personal and communal, requires persistent, purpose-driven action.

Finally, we were humbled to host Ray Linbaugh, a Vietnam Veteran of the legendary 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, known as The Walking Dead. His battalion bore one of the highest casualty rates in the war, and Ray walked us through that legacy not with bitterness, but with grace. Ray's story is not just about surviving combat, it's about surviving what comes after. His reflections on memory, loss, and brotherhood reminded us that some battles are fought in silence, long after the shooting stops.

Together, these highlighted episodes brought us face-to-face with different kinds of courage: the courage to create, to keep serving, and to survive. As The Veterans Voice continues to grow into a platform for dialogue, introspection, and connection, we remain committed to elevating voices like these — voices that stir something in us, shift our perception, and point us toward growth.

As always, thank you for being part of this journey. Share the message, stay curious, and remember:

You're not alone. ■



Scan the QR code to check us out on YouTube!

Community Outreach

We have several outreach events coming up:

- **Peaks and Pours - October 4, 2025 UC Health Park**
- **Bataan Death March Colorado- October 11, 2025 Larkspur, CO**
- **Veterans Homeless Standdown- October 21, 2025 Weidner Field**
- **Resiliency and Wellness Summit- October 31, 2025 Polaris Hotel**
- **Veterans Day Parade- November 8, 2025 Downtown, Colorado Springs**
- **Hoedown for Heroes- November 14, 2025 Flying W Ranch**

Volunteer Spotlight: SGT Christopher Melo



SGT Christopher Melo is an active duty service member in the Army. He is 26 years old and works for 1st Space Brigade on Fort Carson. His job in the Army involves information technology support and he earned a professional certification this year which was Security +. SGT Melo was on the Brigades' Best Warrior Team and made it to the division-level competitions. He is very active outdoors hiking and playing sports. Additionally, he is working towards earning the Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal (MOVSM). He has volunteered for multiple events supporting Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center with over 50 volunteer hours. A true example of selfless service. ■