

## Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center



### One-Stop For Veterans & Military

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### The Beacon of Support Turns 3: From Idea to Community Cornerstone

When I was a kid, I hated to pause at birthday parties for the cake, ice cream and singing. The party was too exciting, and I was always having too much fun! At Mt. Carmel, there's so much happening that, in many ways, I feel the same – but it's important that we recognize and celebrate Mt. Carmel's third year serving our military, veterans and their families.



Three years ago, we embraced an idea and began a journey delivering best practices in Career and Transition, Behavioral Health and Wellness, Supportive Services, partnered services, and in providing safe event space. No one knew for certain what would happen the day after the ribbon cutting at our front door. Today, we know...we have directly and positively impacted the lives of 5,000 clients through more than 25,000 client visits.

Our Transition and Employment Programs helped career-seeking, transitioning service members, veterans, and military spouses land more than 1,200 jobs. One of our programs resulted in average client salaries of \$27.52 an hour. We've established a highly-impactful Military Spouse Career Program where participants achieve a 67 percent hire rate within 30 days, and our paid intern program for in-demand career opportunities achieved 130 percent of its program goal.

Our employment days, career workshops, industry employment fairs, networking events, mock interview workshops and career counseling have resulted in collaborative relationships with community partners and employers, and have attracted the attention of talent seekers at the city, county, state and national levels.

We've provided over 8,000 hours of behavioral health and wellness services, to include traditional counseling and non-traditional therapies. In doing so, we're proudly developing future cohorts of clinicians who are culturally competent in caring for the military and veteran community through our partnerships with master's programs within academia up and down the front range.

Regional and national partnerships allow our supportive services case managers to provide a crucial hand-up to more than 900 clients. This is always done with a mindset of a warm-handover, meeting the clients where they are,

## **Staff**

**Col (R) Robert McLaughlin**  
COO

**Leslie Abrams**  
Administrative Assistant

**Dave Burton**  
Director, Operations

**Paul Price**  
Director, Employment & Transition

### **Peer Navigators**

**Adam Baker**  
**Richard A. Gagne**  
**Jessica Griser**  
**Tandi Zerfoss**

**Janet Farley**  
MilSpouse Career Program Manager

**SaCorra Ned**  
HB 16-1276 Internship Job Coach

**Kirsten Belaïre**  
Director, Behavioral Health Program

**Abbey Westphal**  
Behavioral Health Retreat Coord.

**Savannah Cunning**  
Behavioral Health Admin Asst.

**Nicole Holling**  
Director, Veteran & Family Resources

**Katie Travis**  
Resource Navigator

**Tina Randall**  
Supportive Services Case Manager

**Hilary Bryant**  
Volunteer Program Coordinator

**Shawna E. Dusharm**  
Greet and Connect

**Lisa Buckman**  
Director, Partner Development

**Randall Stubbs**  
Director, Philanthropy

**Carol Arnold**  
Deputy Director, Donor Relations

**Melodie Owens**  
Deputy Director, Events & Sales

**Bill Miller**  
Controller

**Nannette Cioffi**  
Staff Accountant

**Dean Miller**  
Dir, Communications & Marketing

**Keisha Lancaster**  
Facilities, Resource & Event Coord.

**Randy Gradishar**  
Outreach Coordinator

conducting a careful intake to offer additional services they may need within Mt. Carmel and throughout our extensive network of community partners.

With our client-for-life approach backed by our direct-assistance model, Mt. Carmel proudly delivers dignified support to veterans and their families of all service eras toward positive outcomes – in pursuit of a career or employment, a hand-up from crisis, or health and well-being. Mt. Carmel, today, is evolving toward that indispensable role as the center of our Pikes Peak region veteran community that we believed it would become when we opened our doors in 2016.

Continued career success of clients, partners and former team members has developed an extended family of volunteers and new partnerships for the betterment of our next client.

Regional news media outlets look to Mt. Carmel for comment on big, veteran-focused issues. Elected officials and local employers choose Mt. Carmel as the venue of choice for important announcements, impacting one of the largest veteran populations in the nation.

It is a very Happy Birthday indeed! To all clients, partners, supporters and friends, thank you for helping us reach this incredible milestone. We're excited for a very bright future!

### **Happy Birthday – By the Numbers**

**As we celebrate our third birthday, we're proud to note some key accomplishments. In just three years, we have:**

- Helped more than 5,000 clients through 25,000 visits
- Helped find 1,200 jobs for military spouses at an average of \$27.52/hour
- Achieved a 67% MilSpouse hire rate in 30 days as clients
- Provided 8,000+ hours of behavioral health and wellness services annually
- Delivered a hand-up to more than 900 clients
- Implemented a client-for-life approach with a warm-handover concept
- Supported all efforts with a dedicated staff, volunteers, donors, board members and community partners!

By Col. Bob McLaughlin, U.S. Army, Retired  
Chief Operating Officer

## **Welcome, Mr. Governor!**

Mt. Carmel was proud to welcome Colorado Governor Jared Polis for an important conversation about our programs and partnerships, which directly and positively help veterans, service members and their families. While here, Governor Polis received an overview of our mission, spoke with team members and received a tour of Mt. Carmel.



## Katie's Story: Month of the Military Child



In 1986, Secretary of Defense Casper W. Weinberger decided the sacrifices made by children of military servicemembers deserved special recognition. Throughout April, Mt. Carmel joins the nation in celebrating Month of the Military Child.

As part of our celebration, we sat down with Mt. Carmel team member Katie Travis, proud, successful and resilient daughter to retired Army Special Forces soldier, Rory Travis.

When Katie was 16, Fort Carson became her father's final Army assignment following a distinguished career. Katie was thrilled to finally have one final place to call home as active-duty service members typically relocate school-age children an average of six to nine times during their service, in addition to separation during training and deployments.

"The constant moves the Army required during my childhood were upsetting and unsettling, but in hindsight, I became a more "culturally-aware" person as a result," said Katie. "Our family was continually introduced to new people, cultures and community norms. I used to resent the Army for taking me away from my family and friends. But I grew to appreciate that it afforded me a more extensive worldview."

Prior to 9/11, Katie's father deployed often, but there was rarely a sense of worry about his safety. "He and my mom focused on protecting us from the realities of his career. That soon changed after 9/11," said Katie. "It was lonely; Dad was gone for many months-long, year-long (and longer) combat deployments. As a pre-teen, the protective bubble of Dad's deployments would burst.

"My mom, sisters and I were hopeful and grateful for the occasional email, voice mail or phone call from him to say, 'I'm safe'. The tree, the turkey, the decorations, birthday candles and presents, were always less important in comparison," said Katie.

Today, Katie's dad is long-retired and manages the resiliency program at Fort. Carson, and Katie is in her senior year at CSU-Pueblo. She credits her upbringing and her dad's current role for influencing her plan to become a social worker.

"Mom and Dad raised me and my sisters to be independent, hardworking and to conduct ourselves with great self-confidence with a winning mind set," said Katie. "I don't expect things to be handed to me; I work hard for me, for Mt. Carmel and for our clients." Today, as a Mt. Carmel Supportive Services case manager, Katie helps our clients with a hand-up, often on their worst day.

"I can relate to arriving in a community without a sense of personal network and being far from family. My goal, and that of Mt. Carmel, is never to be the hand-out, but the hand-up: to provide resources and tools to recover and thrive. My upbringing aligns perfectly – I'm able to mentor clients towards self-empowerment to reverse a negative spiral," said Katie.

Demonstrating a common understanding of the military and veteran lifestyle as an insider provides Katie immediate credibility with clients to quickly assess and translate their urgency of need.

"I'm proud to manage assistance for 40-70 veterans and families at any given time; and proud of the crucial hand-up my team has provided more than 900 clients in various personal crisis," said Katie.

# Make a Difference Today!

At Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center, we believe military heroes need a hand-up, not a handout. You can play an important role and have a direct impact on thousands of veterans in our community!

**Donate today to help provide vital services, programs and resources.**

**[Visit VeteransCenter.org to Donate](http://VisitVeteransCenter.org)**

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## Notes from Those We Serve

### Army Captain Tiffany Carlson



Mt. Carmel first helped Tiffany in the spring of 2018 when she visited our Transition and Employment team on the recommendation of her supervisor.

“At the time, I was pursuing medical school, and personal interviews were a crucial part of the admissions process,” said Tiffany. “I was lacking in my interview skills at the time, and Mt. Carmel had a great reputation in this area.”

Peer Navigator Jessica Griser spent time with Tiffany, ultimately preparing her through mock interviews in panel and individual format at Mt. Carmel. “In uniform, we use rehearsals to ensure we’re ready,” said Tiffany. “Through mock interviews and follow-up feedback from Jessica, I felt incredibly well-prepared to shine during my medical school interviews.”

Ultimately, Tiffany was granted interviews with four medical schools, accepting an August 2019 enrollment with Midwestern University/Chicago College of Osteopathic Medicine. As she continues her transition from the service, Mt. Carmel stands ready to provide continued support.

“I think service members need to plan their exit strategy. Mt. Carmel is that one-stop shop -- they take care of all veterans, and veterans at every stage of life,” said Tiffany. “For me, they provided a peer navigator to help me succeed. For others who are long past their initial career separation, they offer help and are a reminder that veterans and their families are not alone. Our veterans, our transitioning service members and our families are lucky to have Mt. Carmel as a resource.”

### Army Veteran Thomas Buettner



Mt. Carmel is proud to have helped veteran and client Thomas Buettner! Thomas marked his career transition from the Army in January and now starts his dream job in emergency services at a regional hospital.

In early January, Thomas interviewed for a variety of opportunities and signed up for Prep Connect 360, an advanced jobseeker course for veterans, transitioning service members and military spouses conducted in partnership with Mt. Carmel and the Pikes Peak Workforce Center. “That was an amazing course, and it made me wish I had visited Mt. Carmel six months earlier. A good resume may get you an interview, but to land a job, you need to nail the interview. The training related to behavioral interview questions was incredible. The course gave me confidence to effectively prepare for, and crush, any future interview,” said Thomas. “And the Workforce Center was incredible – I actually visited them again to discuss additional certifications and services they offer. They provide an incredible service to veterans.”

As Thomas begins his next chapter, he is reflective about his career transition. “I’m ready and excited for this incredible new opportunity in our community, but I’m so thankful for the support and advice of an incredible personal and professional network who helped me to reach this point.”

## Battle Rages Against Veteran Suicide



Mt. Carmel continues the fight against the national tragedy of veteran suicide with a robust Behavioral Health and Wellness program supported by all other Mt. Carmel programs, services and partners. Mt. Carmel's Chief Operating Officer, Retired Army Col. Bob McLaughlin, and our Behavioral Health Program Director, Kirsten Belaire, discussed our efforts with KRDO/ABC news channel 13.

Watch the story at <https://www.krdo.com/news/colorado-springs/heroes-lost-a-krdo-newschannel-13-special-report/997247501>

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## Looking for a Way to Honor a Loved One?



Honor a loved one or show your support of a veteran friend or family member by purchasing a brick or paver, featured as part of our Veterans Tribute Walkway on the Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center campus.

The proceeds are used to continue providing our essential veterans services. Bricks range from \$175 - \$200; Pavers from \$750 - \$850. They can even be personalized with military emblems.



To order your brick or paver, or for additional information, visit [thatsmybrick.com/mtevcsc](https://thatsmybrick.com/mtevcsc)

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## Local Employers Support Mock Interviews to Prepare Job Seekers



Ten regional employers representing in-demand careers conducted mock interviews for Mt. Carmel clients on March 21. Clients included currently transitioning veterans and veterans and military spouses of all eras. Previous experience with this effort demonstrates some clients are likely to receive actual employment offers.

## War on MilSpouse Unemployment/Underemployment



Mt. Carmel, in partnership with KRDO NewsRadio/KRDO NewsChannel 13 / KRDO.com and MilHousing Network, conducted the National MilSpouse Career Summit on April 4. The live webcast from Mt. Carmel in Colorado Springs featured two panels of experts –resource providers and employers – who are working to turn the tide on national military spouse unemployment (currently 30%) and underemployment (currently 56%). A special thank-you to our panelists and partners for making this effort possible!

**Watch the Summit at** <https://veteranscenter.org/news-coverage/>

## We're Offering Paid Internships with Regional Employers!



Mt. Carmel is excited to offer paid internships with regional employers in high-demand careers for veterans, transitioning military, and military spouses. The program eliminates risk for employers to offer a new opportunity to a veteran or military spouse.

“The program offers opportunities in advanced manufacturing, medical, construction, and many other in-demand occupations,” said Jessica Griser, Mt. Carmel program manager and peer navigator. Conducted in partnership with the Pikes Peak Workforce Center, paid internships include up to 300 hours of wages for participants.

Full-time hire decisions made early in the internships by employers enabled Mt. Carmel to maximize the program. In 2018, more than 40 internships provided access to careers for the military, veteran, and military spouse community.

Contact Jessica at [jgriser@mtcarmelcenter.org](mailto:jgriser@mtcarmelcenter.org) or visit the Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center for more information.

## Are You Listening to the Veterans Voice?

THE MT. CARMEL VETERANS VOICE PODCAST  
with MIKE LEWIS



Presented by USAA  
In Partnership with  
Star Dental Institute



The Mt. Carmel Veteran's Voice podcast is presented by USAA in partnership with Star Dental Institute and Together We Smile the second and fourth Saturday of each month. Veteran's Voice features success stories of Mt. Carmel clients and partners, and highlights resources available to military, veterans and their families.

Listen to the **April 6 show** at <http://tinyurl.com/VVApril6>

Listen to the **March 23 show** at <https://tinyurl.com/Mar23vv>

Listen to the **March 9 show** at <http://tinyurl.com/VV9Mar>

Listen to the **February 23 show** at <http://tinyurl.com/Feb23vv>

## Congratulations, it's a...Baby!



Mt. Carmel threw a Baby Shower to celebrate with expecting parents of U.S. Army Fort Carson's 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division (Iron Brigade). Through generous support of our community partners, we provided food, beverages, games, decorations and thanked each family for their service with a baby bundle of clothes, diapers, blankets, baby bath tubs, infant car seats and more.

## Thank You for Your Service!



Retired Army Col. Bob McLaughlin, Mt. Carmel Chief Operating Officer, and Mt. Carmel Community Ambassador Randy Gradishar, former Denver Broncos #53, All-American "Orange Crush" Defense, were honored to join WWII, Korea and Vietnam veterans today for a special lunch at Brookdale Senior Living-Bear Creek, a neighbor to Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center.

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## **Welcome Tandi Zerfoss, our newest Peer Navigator and Job Coach!**



Tandi is a U.S. Army Veteran retiring from the Army Reserve after 21 years of service including 8 years on active duty. Following her active duty service, Tandi earned her Bachelor's of Science in Business Computer Information Systems and combined it with experience gained in Military Intelligence Electronic Warfare to build a successful career in Information Technology. Later, she earned a Master's of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling and Psychology in pursuit of a passion and calling to serve veterans. Originally from Louisiana, Tandi is the proud mother to a daughter and a son; and Mimi to her four granddaughters. She loves to cook, fish, travel, and volunteer when she's not visiting her granddaughters.

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### **Upcoming Events**

(additional events at [veteranscenter.org](http://veteranscenter.org))

#### **Spiritual Connection Group**

Non-denominational discussion of spirituality  
April 9, 10am - 2 pm

#### **Veteran-X PTS-Focused Group**

April 9, 4:30 - 6:30pm

#### **Yoga, PT/Trauma Relief-Focus**

April 9, 5 - 6pm

#### **Medicare Mentors Q & A with Experts**

April 9, 1 - 5 pm, Call (719) 772-7000 for appointment

**Veterans Advocacy Project**

Legal assistance

April 10, 10am - 2 pm, Call (719) 772-7000 for appointment

**Warriors First**

Support group for justice-involved veterans

April 10, 4 - 5pm

**Art Therapy**

Promoting stress relief and self-healing

April 10, 5 - 7pm

**Tax Preparation (electronic filing for all)**

April 10, 10am - 4pm

**PTS Support Group**

April 11, 10 - 11am

**Tax Preparation (electronic filing for all)**

April 11, 11am - 4:30pm

**Website & Social Media Assistance for Vet/Milspouse Entrepreneurs**

April 12, Call (719) 772-7000 for appointment

**Family Easter Egg Hunt & Service**

April 13, 11:30am - 1:30pm

**Half-day Equine Therapy Retreat for Veterans & Military**

April 13, Call (719) 309-4761 to register

**Easter Egg Hunt**

Food, bounce houses, face painting & more

Sponsored by Mt. Carmel at Ft. Carson

April 14, Pershing Field, Open to all with installation access, 12:30 - 2:30pm

**Living with Chronic Pain/Illness**

Begins April 17, 6-week class, Call (303) 927-9225 to register

**Half-day Equine Therapy Retreat for Teens of Military & Veterans 13-17 yrs old**

April 27, Free, Register by calling Abbey Westphal at (719) 309-4761

**Free Hazardous Waste Worker Training**

April 29 - May 10, Call Richard Gagne at (719) 772-7000 to register

**Are you following us?**

Please follow us on social media and our website at [veteranscenter.org](http://veteranscenter.org). Your likes, comments and shares are a welcomed part of the Mt. Carmel conversation. Follow us at the following platforms:

