



A Beacon of Support

December 2024 - January 2025 | Issue #52

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By Bob McLaughlin, Executive Director

Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center kicked off 2025 with the rescheduled Hoedown for Heroes—and if y’all missed it, you missed a darn good time! More than 500 people showed up for great food, wonderful music and some mighty fine dancing.

It was all to raise money for a good cause—Mt. Carmel’s support for military members, veterans and their families through our wraparound services. It is our privilege to assist them as they meet life’s challenges.

A huge thank you to everyone who came out to celebrate and to those who donated to our mission. Your financial contributions help keep the lights on, provide fuel for the engine, and ensure our clients’ needs are met.

As we look ahead to the rest of 2025 (including our next Hoedown on Nov. 14!), the support of our friends, ambassadors and partners is more important than ever. YOU are the vital link between what our clients and families need and what Mt. Carmel can do for them. With your help, we can continue to expand our footprint across the Front Range and Southern Colorado to assist more veterans in need and save lives.

We are now supporting rural communities through initiatives like homebuyer classes and employment assistance in Trinidad, coffee meetings and leatherworking classes in Alamosa, and book clubs and veteran roundtables in Westcliffe—all designed to bring veterans together. We also provide the same services in these towns that we do in Colorado Springs since our doors first opened in 2016.

In Pueblo, the Home of Heroes, our initial office space has quadrupled, and we are now part of the Helping Hands Coalition, which helps hundreds of community members every month. The event includes a mobile DMV center, free vaccine clinics, and food distribution in partnership with Care and Share Food Bank of Southern Colorado.

Sal Katz Jr., Director of Rural Colorado Operations, and his team continue to assist veterans with finding jobs, homes, security, and even starting their own business. Like in Colorado Springs, we support those struggling with the aftermath of war through behavioral



Bob McLaughlin

health services, along with talk, equine, and art therapies. We offer tai chi and yoga classes, free acupuncture, massages, eyeglass appointments, and dental checkups — even couples’ retreats. We help without judgment to those who need our assistance, and we never turn anyone away.

At Mt. Carmel, we support all veterans, regardless of their time in service or type of discharge. Through our partners, we offer legal assistance, access to County Veteran Service Officers, and help navigating veteran benefits through the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The list is long, our services are impactful, and the need continues to grow. Your support is critical to ensuring we can continue taking care of our veterans, military members and their families by offering a hand up with our integrated, wraparound services. We are grateful for our partnerships and the support of our amazing community!

Thank you! ■

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



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COLORADO SPRINGS SPORTS CORP

Partner Spotlight

We're proud to highlight our valued partner, the Colorado Springs Sports Corporation (CSSC).

Established in 1979 to help relocate the U.S. Olympic Committee to Colorado Springs, CSSC continues to inspire and advance Olympic City USA and the Pikes Peak region through exceptional sport and community events.

Its mission is to foster community engagement and promote tourism through world-class events that make positive economic and social impacts.

From the Downtown Summer Fest to the Rocky Mountain State Games, CSSC brings together

civic leaders and premier sporting organizations to create unforgettable experiences.

Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center is honored to collaborate with Sports Corp., offering veterans the chance to participate as volunteers or athletes in their diverse lineup of events. Annual highlights include the Colorado Springs Labor Day Lift Off, Pikes Peak APEX, and the Star-Spangled Symphony & Fourth of July Fireworks.

Get involved by visiting SportsCorp.org. ■

Department Updates



Transition and Employment

The first hiring event of the year went off without a hitch! We had more than 30 employers here and a record number of people seeking jobs: 176! We'll be holding the events quarterly from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on the last Wednesday of the first month of the quarter. We'll also hold the Veterans Beer Club networking event the same day at 5:30 p.m.

As of December 2024, the Transition and Employment Department has facilitated over 4,600 placements. We are projecting to have 5,000 no later than the final quarter of 2025.

Please welcome Lauren Wild, our newest Veterans Integration Program Peer Navigator! ■



Military, Veteran, and Family Services

It's been a very busy few months for the MVFS team. We identified four families with a total of eight children for our Angel Tree. We then had a special request from a partner organization that allowed us to help one family that has seven children. What an amazing Christmas they all had, thanks to the generosity of our partners!

MVFS decided to branch out and also provided gifts for senior veterans through the Angel Tree program. We worked in partnership with Pikes Peak Post Acute to spread holiday cheer to nine veterans in their care.

MVFS also hosted a holiday food support day and signed up 100 veteran households for Safeway gift cards.

Please welcome our new Financial Coach, Nick Elliott, who previously served as a case manager. Shantel Ware takes on his former role, and has been an incredible asset as a work study since 2022. ■



Greet & Connect

The start of the new year has been full of positive changes. VOPA/Eye Love Care relocated to a location on Printers Parkway, we have moved our partners Medicare Mentors and El Paso County Veteran Services into new space to serve our clients effectively and efficiently. We are glad they are here.

Also, The AARP Free Tax Service is ready to rock and roll! Starting February 5, they'll offer free tax assistance every Wednesday through April 9. AARP's team of volunteers can make the process easier for first-time filers and those with more complicated taxes. Don't miss out on this valuable service—

mark your calendars and get your documents ready. If interested, please contact the front desk to sign up for an appointment slot.

The G&C team frequently rents out space for various events and programs, making it a versatile community hub. If you know any organization or individual in need of event space, please have them contact the front desk.

The Greet and Connect team is excited and ready for another year of helping veterans navigate programs and services in Mt. Carmel and the community! ■

Department Updates



Health and Wellness

Behavioral Health had a new round of interns join our team for the spring semester. We are continuing to enhance our Lethal Means Safety procedures and are working to include FFAST (Family FireArms Secure storage Training) training and interventions.

Mt. Carmel was highlighted in the Colorado Springs Health Foundation Impact Results presentation. We are ever grateful for CSHF's continued fiscal support, which they started in 2016 and have continued throughout the years. Our program could not be what it is without supporters like CSHF.

Kirsten provided her 'Trauma and the Brain' presentation to more than 100 military leaders on Ft. Carson for the SHARP stand down. And will provide a suicide prevention class for the SHARP team in April.

Our behavioral health team is going through some big changes as Kirsten begins the slow transition away from her role as director. We will begin the process of finding a new director and provide training for the new director once selected. ■



Next Chapter

Next Chapter continues its commitment to veterans and their families. We achieved a major milestone of completing over 1,200 intakes with veterans and their families since our inception and are proud to serve our community.

Next Chapter has continued to attend and facilitate events through

the winter months, including a military competency training and Wreaths Across America.

While we are excited and committed to serving our veteran community, we are slowing down our intake appointments as we patiently wait for further guidance from the state regarding Next Chapter. ■



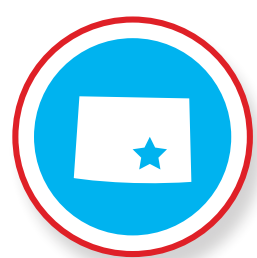
VBOC

As the Colorado Veterans Business Outreach Center at Mt. Carmel continues its second fiscal year, we have 697 active clients, with 1,478 counseling sessions and 50 training events. The Colorado VBOC will continue providing business counseling sessions face-to-face, virtually, and over the phone.

Since our last update, the Colorado VBOC has hosted or co-hosted 10 business training courses statewide, including Planning Your Small Business, Introduction to the CO VBOC, Franchising Fundamentals Workshop, CO VBOC Data Defense Course, CO VBOC Business Plan Workshop, Boots to Business | Reboot, and multiple Boots to Business events.

In addition, we welcome Joe Reagan, the new director of the Colorado Veterans Business Outreach Center. Thank you to Mark Smith for keeping the lights on at the CO VBOC while we were in a transition period.

The Colorado VBOC regularly attends local outreach events to educate the community, organizations, businesses, and resource partners about our programs and services. These include VetNet, APEX Accelerators, COSSBA, American Club Association (ACA), Cyber First Fridays, Catalyst Campus, Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce and EDC, Pikes Peak Small Business Development Center, Mi Casa Women's Business Center, and SCORE mentors. ■



Southern Colorado



Southern Colorado is more than just a community—we're a family. At Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center, we're honored to serve veterans, military members and their families in Pueblo and across the region. Thanks to your support, we've set ambitious goals for 2025 to ensure every veteran receives the care and support they deserve.

2025 Goal: Expanding Wraparound Services

This year, we will significantly broaden wraparound services for military members, veterans and their families. Through our partners, we will address critical needs such as housing, employment, behavioral health, financial stability, and overall well-being.

Our goal is to serve 20 percent more veterans and families in 2025, and we plan to continue to foster partnerships to provide wraparound services to those in need.

We'll use data from all our services to make sure we're reaching the right audience and that services are delivered efficiently with a focus on outcomes.

In addition, we plan to launch outreach campaigns in rural and underserved areas across Southern Colorado.

To accomplish our goal, we also plan to secure at least three new funding sources or partnerships to support our programs.

2024 Achievements

Thanks to the unwavering support of our partners and donors, we had significant progress in 2024. Through financial support from organizations in rural communities, our team and partners have addressed the pressing needs of veterans.

Highlights of our services and their impact in Pueblo:

- **Helping Hands Pueblo Community Coalition:** Provided assistance to 2,125 individuals facing food insecurity
- **Massage Therapy in partnership with Intellitec College:** Delivered therapeutic massage sessions to 169 veterans
- **Acudetox services by Southern Colorado National Association of Hispanic Nurses:** Offered stress relief and emotional wellness support to 199 veterans
- **Art therapy with Sangre De Cristo Art Center:** Engaged 369 veterans in art programs
- **Rejuviet Hot Sauna therapy:** Provided 85 veterans with sauna therapy
- **BEMER (Bio-Electro-Magnetic-Energy-Regulation) therapy:** Benefited 67 veterans by improving circulation
- **Next Chapter Mental Health Support:** Served 97 veterans and their families, offering mental health resources



Custer County: (Westcliffe) In 2024, the Veteran Resource and Community Development Coordinator from Mt. Carmel filled service gaps through collaborative wraparound support. By partnering with local organizations and agencies, we ensured that veterans in Custer County have access to needed resources to meet their needs.

The Custer County Veteran Service Officer reported a significant annual increase in compensation for veterans, totaling over \$2.4 million from

Office Updates



August 1, 2023, to December 31, 2024. Remarkably, over \$1.1 million of this total was achieved in just the final five months of 2024.

These efforts underscore Custer County's commitment to enhance financial benefits, address service gaps, and build a support network for its veterans.

San Luis Valley: (Alamosa): In 2024, Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center played a pivotal role through the efforts of its Veteran Resource & Community Development Coordinator. Collaborative initiatives were key in addressing the needs of the veteran community in the region.

Valley Veterans ReCreation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to serving veterans and first responders, established a new resource center in Monte Vista. This center provides ample space for activities aimed at promoting the well being of veterans. The LOR Foundation assisted with funding for the building's acquisition.

The San Luis Valley introduced a Project Healing Waters fly-fishing program to serve disabled veterans and active-duty military personnel. Supported by the local Trout Unlimited Chapter, the program offers year-round activities, including fly tying, rod building, fly-fishing instruction, and outings, at no cost to participants. These initiatives serve to provide therapeutic outdoor experiences for veterans.

The Alamosa County Veterans Service Office assisted veterans and their dependents with access to various VA benefits, including service-connected disability compensation, service-connected pensions, VA healthcare enrollment, and education benefits.

Las Animas County: (Trinidad): In Las Animas County, Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center has been supporting veterans through its Veteran Resource & Community Development Coordinator. We continue to collaborate with local organizations and agencies to provide comprehensive services for local veterans. These services include transition and employment assistance, behavioral health and wellness programs, and supportive services that connect veterans to essential community resources.

Our mission continues as we strive to serve over 25,000 veterans across Southern Colorado, including the 13,000 who call Pueblo County home. The demand for these essential services is growing, and ongoing collaboration is crucial to ensuring we meet the needs of our veteran community. ■





The Veterans Voice Project



We've kicked off our Department of Veterans Affairs series! Steve Bundy, a VA peer support specialist, starts us off by breaking some VA myths. Later in the episode, Steve gets personal and shares his story about being injured, PTSD, and how coping through addiction landed him and his family into homelessness. Next in the series, we are looking forward to hosting Chad Armstrong, one of Mt. Carmel's

Veteran Service Officers. This month we aired our Good News Stories episode with Justina Baker, as well as our interview with Angela Walter, an Army Special Operations Public Affairs Specialist to discuss war, peace, and the gray area between.

To be a part of The Veterans Voice community, scan the QR code and join us on Youtube! ■

Partner Relations

Happy New Year, everyone! We hope you had a wonderful holiday season. As we step into 2025, we're excited to reflect on some of the successes from the past quarter and look forward to continuing our strong partnerships in the year ahead.

We're thrilled to announce that we've added eight new ambassadors to our Ambassador Program! These individuals bring passion and dedication to our mission, and we're looking forward to the fresh perspectives they'll contribute.

A few highlights from our recent events:

Salute to Heroes: In support of our Pueblo location, the event raised approximately \$81,976.20. We couldn't be more thankful for your support. The event was a tremendous success, thanks to all of you who helped make it happen.

Hoedown for Heroes: Our largest annual event took place at the Flying W Ranch this year, and it was our best one yet! The event ran smoothly and received countless compliments for its outstanding organization and execution. We're proud to see it continue to grow and thrive.

These events are a testament to the power of our partnerships, and we look forward to building on this momentum in the months ahead.

As always, if you have any questions or ideas for further collaboration, don't hesitate to reach out to me. Here's to another year of success together!

If you'd like to explore new ways to collaborate, feel free to contact our Partner Relations Coordinator, Abbi Gregory, at Agregory@mtcarmelcenter.org ■.

Community Outreach & Events

Happy New Year! We are looking forward to seeing you at the upcoming late winter and early spring outreach events. Please feel free to call or email us for more information:

- **February 15 - Cribbage-palooza**
- **March 15 - St. Patrick's Day Grand Marshal Reception & Parade**

Call: (719) 772-7000

Email: LCink@MtCarmelCenter.org ■