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WELCOME HOME ALLIANCE FOR VETERANS IS SEEKING FUNDING TO PURCHASE A BUILDING OF OUR OWN TO HOUSE OUR WARRIOR RESOURCE CENTER AND THE SERVICES WE OFFER.

WHY WE MATTER

Many veterans leave service with physical injuries such as amputations and burns, but others' injuries are less visible. Twenty-two veterans commit suicide every day, 11 percent of the nation's homeless are veterans, and unemployment rates, especially for young veterans, are high. Divorce rate and college drop-out rates are much higher than average among veterans. Clearly, the current paradigm is not working for our military families.

The problem is that the military's purpose is to train warriors, the Veteran's Administration's job is to assist and medically treat those warriors, but neither consider it their responsibility to help these warriors and their families become thriving citizens when discharged from service. That only comes from being appreciated and accepted, feeling like you fit in, having a social network, and living in a community that meets your needs.

Only 1% of Americans serve our country on behalf of the other 99% of us and it is OUR responsibility to unite to help them thrive as civilians at home. During WWII, we saw the desire to help the American war effort by average civilians when they were asked to step up. That American spirit is still strong but since those days, there hasn't been a way to offer that personal help. Welcome Home Montrose, Inc. (DBA Welcome Home Alliance for Veterans) channels that spirit and directly connects the local community to our military families.

OUR ORIGIN STORY

Welcome Home Montrose, Inc (WHM) was inspired by a news story about Team River Runner, a volunteer program assisting the recovery of injured veterans at Walter Reed Hospital through kayaking. It focused on how adventure and recreation helped them heal. As I watched,

I envisioned Montrose and the Uncompaghe River, myriad outdoor recreational opportunities, great weather, peaceful surroundings and adventurous day trips in every direction, as a community that could welcome and heal veterans. I looked for similar efforts around the country to be our model and, finding none, held focus groups with 200+ community members and organizations to gauge their reaction and learn how they could contribute.

In late November 2011, we applied for nonprofit status and assembled a board of directors from Montrose leaders in key positions to launch this initiative. Immediately, the City of Montrose, Montrose County commissioners, the Downtown Development Authority, Montrose Chamber of Commerce, Montrose Economic Development Corporation, the Montrose Recreation District, and Friends of the River Uncompaghre formally committed to the mission of Welcome Home Montrose by passing "Resolution to Support" documents.

In November 2012, Welcome Home Montrose (WHM) received our determination letter and became a registered non-profit organization, committed to uniting the community of Montrose in a mission "setting the standard in how to serve those who stepped up to serve all of us ... by strengthening our services, identifying and filling our gaps, creating programs, and removing the barriers in our community [to prepare] a place where any veteran of our armed forces can thrive in the life they choose."

Veterans face a variety of challenges as they transition from military to civilian life, and WHM sought to learn how to address them. The board of directors chose two initial projects as "living feasibility studies" to welcome veterans to Montrose: the Dream Job program that placed veterans in mentored "dream jobs" with professionals in the community who volunteered their time and others who subsidized their housing for 6 months; and Mission: No Barriers, which brought injured veterans for a week of recreational activities, relaxation and hometown hospitality provided by over 200 volunteers and businesses. We asked only that they assess current resources for them in Montrose and help us eliminate the barriers they encountered.

While these initial projects enjoyed success, WHM learned that there were many barriers facing the 3500+ veterans who already called Montrose County home, so the board temporarily shifted its focus to improving Montrose as a place for veterans and their families to visit and, hopefully, stay. Before any formal outreach could be implemented, there was a lot to do. This involved strengthening available services and filling gaps, improving access for people with disabilities, and partnering with other organizations addressing hunger, homelessness and mental health. It also meant working closely to advise the county and the city as to the unique needs of this population. That has been our focus for the past 5 years.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

Point of Contact: Opening a portal for community support to military families

In September 2012, WHM opened the Warrior Resource Center (WRC) as a safe place for veterans to access programs and resources in one location. From the minute the doors opened, the WRC became a portal of giving and receiving. Donations of every kind and offers of help consistently appear. Homemade baked goods, casseroles and coffee arrives regularly. Children and school groups bring cards and letters for local veterans. We maintain a database of retired professionals offering volunteer services to veterans. We post jobs on our bulletin board and work closely with the Workforce Center. This has enabled WHM to provide for any military family or veteran in need, be it furniture, electronics, medical equipment, clothing, food cards or assistance with their careers. The WRC is staffed by volunteers Monday through Friday from 9 am to 5 pm. It houses WHAFV offices and part time offices of the Montrose County Veterans Service Officer, who assists veterans with benefits, and the regional Vet Center, which provides counseling, outreach, and referral services to veterans and their families. All visitors are greeted by a volunteer, trained in suicide prevention by our partnership with the Center for Mental Health, who helps connect them to what they are seeking.

Volunteerism: A Grassroots Opportunity to Serve

Each year, volunteers contribute more than 6000 hours to support WHM through the Warrior Resource Center, fundraising activities, social and recreational activities and veteran support.

High school students volunteer their time to programs at the WRC for graduation credit (see Voice Program). At the time of this writing, the current number is 6870 hours of volunteer time for 2017.

The All American City Award 2013 was awarded to Montrose Colorado

This is a national competition sponsored by the National Civic League whose 2013 theme was "Highlighting Veterans." WHM assembled a group of community members and submitted the application. Montrose won.

The Montrose Water Sports Park

In 2011, Montrose's application for a Department of Local Affairs grant to build a water park on the Uncompaghre River was denied. When the application was rewritten as a partnership between the City, County, Rec District and WHM to include a focus on the accessibility for the disabled, Montrose was awarded the grant.

The City budget for ADA improvements

In 2012, after signing a formal "Resolution to Support" for the mission of WHM into the minutes, there was an annual sum of \$60,000 added to the budget for ADA improvements.

The full time position of the Veterans Service Officer

Until WHM lobbied Montrose County to change this position from part time to full time, the Veteran Service Officer was only available to assist veterans 16 hours per week.

The HUD/VASH housing vouchers in Montrose County

These housing assistance vouchers were only available in Mesa County until WHM lobbied and received 17 vouchers for the homeless military families in Montrose County.

The National Brand of Montrose, Colorado

Along the way, WHM gained impressive volunteer and financial support and national attention, including an appearance on The Glenn Beck Show and articles in Stars and Stripes, USA Today and other major publications. Donna Bryson, an AP journalist and author, spent 4 years researching in Montrose and has written a book entitled Home of the Brave, documenting the Welcome Home Montrose initiative. It will be released in January 2018. As news of our efforts spread, WHM began providing services to veterans from throughout western Colorado and fielding questions from communities around America about how to start similar efforts. The board realized that WHM's influence had spread beyond Montrose, and in 2016 voted to change its name to the Welcome Home Alliance for Veterans (WHAFV) to recognize its expanded scope.

Memorial Day and Veterans Day in Montrose, Colorado

At the WRC, cards and letters pour in from school projects throughout the Western Slope as they begin to learn about American history and war. Some of these are given to our local veterans, others are delivered to our partner, Operation Sweet Tooth, to be sent to active duty service members overseas. Schools contact WHAFV for veterans willing to be keynote speakers at their assemblies.

Around town, the Let Freedom Ring project provides a way for the average citizen to thank military families and veterans for their sacrifices. Twice each year, volunteers create one hundred wind chimes and hang them in public places around Montrose. Individuals who find them are encouraged to take the chimes and present them directly to a veteran or hang them at the home or business of someone who has served in the military. The chimes consist of military dog tags, the American flag, stars, a liberty bell, and shell casings. There is also a small card attached for a written note. Organizations, businesses, churches, and community members take turns underwriting project costs.

IMPACT TO VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Camaraderie

An important part of WHAFV's work is peer support and social networking. The weekly Veterans' Coffee at the WRC had more than 4,400 visits in 2016. The coffees are open only to veterans, and afterward, a group of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder sufferers meet

privately with a licensed counselor from the Vet Center. Spouses of veterans can face challenges, and the WRC hosts a weekly support group, Wives of Warriors. It recorded 235 visits in 2016. Spouses also can attend a monthly Veteran Spouse Luncheon at the WRC, underwritten by local businesses and individuals. Nearly 400 meals were served to them at the Luncheons last year. Every Friday, the WRC hosts a Music Jam, open to all, at which veterans and community members enjoy a potluck dinner and play music.

Employment

Resumes for job seekers and notices from employers looking for help are updated continually on a bulletin board at the WRC. Rich Parr of the Workforce Center informs that he was able to place 63 unemployed veterans into jobs in one calendar year as a direct result of the Center's partnership with WHM.

Recreation

To improve veterans' wellness, WHAFV provides a variety of recreational and therapeutic activities, many in conjunction with community partners. Twice a week, a veteran offers taekwondo classes, which drew nearly 1,900 visits in 2016. Three times a week, a veteran and personal trainer brings his "traveling gym" to the WRC, totaling 550 visits last year. Another volunteer started a Project Healing Waters program to teach disabled veterans how to tie flies, build fly rods, and fish. Through a VA Adaptive Sports grant in 2014, there are kayaks, canoes and paddles, and safety equipment for veterans and their families to use at the Montrose Water Sports Park. Because of a partnership formed with Challenge Aspen and with Telluride Adaptive Sports, many local veterans ski the slopes with instruction at no charge.

Food and Housing

Through our partnerships with Christ's Kitchen, Shepherd's Hand, the Center for Mental Health, Housing Authority, Montrose Elks Club, Grand Junction VA, Workforce Center, and HopeWest, the needs for food and housing are met year round. Annually, the WRC hosts its annual "Stand Down," which brings together resource providers for a day-long event for homeless veterans. Representatives from federal and nonprofit organizations provide information about accessing benefits, counseling, food and clothing, legal services, and housing. Community members provide a variety of hot entrees and dessert. Some knit caps and gloves, others donate warm coats, handmade quilts and sleeping bags. Including providers, there were more than 200 attendees in October 2017.

A place of their own in Montrose County

Currently, more than 1,600 veterans had visited and registered with the WRC. In 2016, the Center recorded 251 instances of follow-up assistance, ranging from employment (40),

housing (30), and wellness (59). WHAFV is also committed to including services for western Montrose County. In 2014, WHAFV began holding monthly Veterans' Coffees in Nucla.

Monthly Honors

The WRC hosts monthly ceremonies to present hand carved Eagle Head Canes to veterans and have provided this honor to over 130 veterans, who attend with their families and share their stories. These canes began in the Civil War when returning soldiers (many with leg injuries) were given canes by their neighbors. Locally, three wood crafting organizations create the canes for veterans in Montrose and the surrounding area.

Preserving their stories: The VOICE Program

The VOICE Program (Veterans Openly Imparting Centuries of Experience) encourages veterans to preserve their stories. Veterans make an appointment at the WRC, and volunteers, using speech recognition software donated by a community member, transcribe their spoken stories, and give the veterans a copy of the transcript. Currently, Montrose High School students studying the Constitution are recording and transcribing these stories with our local veterans for their community service requirement. Bringing the necessary equipment, students visit with these veterans at their homes, nursing homes or meet them at the WRC. Volunteers also can help the veterans add photos and other images to their stories.

Discounts: The Business Window Sticker Program

All veterans who register at the WRC receive a set of dog tags, which can be shown at more than 110 area businesses (each proudly displaying a sticker of support) to receive discounts on goods and services.

In addition, ten businesses in the west end of Montrose County endorse the WHM Business Window Sticker to provide discounts to veterans and their families.

OUR FUNDING SOURCES

Business Window Sticker Program

Over 110 businesses and service providers extend a discount to veterans and support the Warrior Resource Center with a \$100 annual donation. They display a sticker of support in the window of their business. In return, their names and/or business cards appear in all advertising and are displayed prominently on the walls of the WRC. The WHAFV goal is to have 500 participating throughout the Western Slope. Seven new businesses joined this program in October 2017.

Got Your Six Campaign

This is grassroots local fundraising, giving donors the pride of ownership by having a way, however small, to support veterans through WHAFV. In military terms, "got your six" means "I have your back". Donors provide automatic monthly donations in multiples of \$6.

Individual Donations

Community members provide occasional or annual donations. In terms of dollars, this is the largest funding source.

Foundation Grants

We receive small grants from various foundations and organizations.

Community Fundraisers

Annual golf tournaments, 5k runs and rifle tournaments are held by volunteers. In 2017, there was also a fundraising dinner and auction which raised a significant amount. Community members, our volunteers and various businesses have yard sales on our behalf.

Donations at the Warrior Resource Center

Cash Donations are collected in ammo boxes in the reception area. WHAFV also receives cash from the Friday evening Country Jam collections and from occasional rent when other organizations use our social facilities.

In-kind donations such as household items, clothing, food and produce, medical equipment, automobiles, boats, trailers, motorcycles, office equipment and military memorabilia are received. Businesses and individuals often underwrite the costs of our luncheons, veteran coffees, "Let Freedom Ring" chimes, the "Voice" and other programs mentioned above.

Food and Gift Cards are donated to the WRC by individuals and organizations. They are distributed to military families and veterans in need.

SUSTAINABILITY AND GROWTH

New Fundraising Opportunities- A new facility for WHAFV will provide fundraising opportunities that are restricted in the current location. Permanent donor recognition plaques, bingo and raffles, events that include alcohol and dancing, will add to the income.

Video in Production- WHAFV received a grant to fund creation and marketing of video in 2016. A year's worth of footage is now complete. Commentary is being added and films of 3 different lengths are being produced. These will be used on television and for crowdfunding campaigns.

Solid Tenant with a two year lease paying \$1700 per month brings WHAFV monthly costs down considerably in our new location. Also, the VetCenter in Grand Junction, which sends a counselor to clients twice a week at the WRC, has expressed interest in renting a permanent office in the new WRC.

No Storage Expense- Ample room to store donations will make them easier to distribute and eliminate the current payments for storage units each month.

New energy in our grassroots campaigns- WHAFV's executive director and his staff are motivated to increase participation in grassroots fundraising programs like "Got Your Six" and the Business Window Sticker Program. A recent partnership with Montrose High School trains student volunteers to help inform and attract new businesses to the Business Window Sticker Program as part of their community service projects.

Affiliate Program- WHAFV, a proven model, is in the process of completing a formal affiliate program for other communities to follow. This will be purchased by subscription and given in phases.

Additional Grants- Now 6 years old, WHAFV is eligible for grants from funders and philanthropies unwilling to consider supporting younger nonprofit organizations. We have a grant writer on staff now so we can pursue these opportunities. We plan to apply to many who have expressed interest in serving those who served.

Throughout the coming years, the community of Montrose, through WHAFV, will continue to provide services to those who served. We will begin our outreach to recovering veterans across the nation through our Dream Job Program and Mission: No Barriers. To house these services, WHAFV is seeking funding from USDA Rural Development to purchase a larger building for our expanding program.

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Melanie S. Kline".

Melanie Kline
President – Board of Directors