

2023

ANNUAL REPORT

**WHEN THEY'RE
SERVICE ENDS...**

OURS BEGINS





FROM COMBAT TO PEER CONNECTION COACH

“Navy veteran Tony Gaines enlisted in 1973, driven by a desire to see the world. Throughout his service, he took on various roles, including Postal Clerk, Boatswain's Mate, and Boat Coxswain. But his experience in Vietnam, particularly during river patrols, left a profound impact.

"I saw people get killed. I shot and killed a couple of people. I've been blown up," Gaines recalled.

Although he had initially planned to serve 20 years, Gaines left the Navy in 1976 due to personal issues with his family. Unfortunately, the trauma of war followed him home.

"I came back addicted to drugs, but I didn't realize it because I was functional," Gaines explained, noting that the highs became a way to cope with civilian life. "The military didn't prepare us to come home. All I knew to do when I was angry was get high or fight, because that's what military guys did."

His drug use eventually led to run-ins with the law. "I did a few short stints in jail—three years here, three years there—for assault," Gaines admitted. Those complications eventually landed him on the streets.

It was during this period of homelessness that Gaines first encountered the Veterans Outreach Center (VOC) in the mid-1980s. "When I needed help finding an apartment, they helped me. When I needed a job, they helped me get one. I wouldn't be here without the VOC."

After a long and difficult journey, Gaines overcame his addiction and now uses his experiences to help fellow veterans. Today, he works at VOC's Steve Preston Peer Connection Center as a peer recovery coach, where he provides support to veterans in need.

"(The center) is a place where veterans can find common ground, and from there, we can assess their needs. Some are homeless, others have homes but are isolated and alone," he said.

If you're a veteran facing uncertainty, stop by and meet Gaines and the rest of the VOC team. The center is open Monday through Saturday from 3 p.m. to 11 p.m.

"We've got you," Gaines said.

”

A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

LAURA HELTZ



This past year at the Veterans Outreach Center has been one of profound growth and unwavering dedication. As we reflect on our journey, one theme resonates most: digging deeper. This phrase encapsulates our commitment to not just meet the needs of our veterans but to go above and beyond in finding solutions to the challenges they face. It is this relentless pursuit of excellence that has driven us to make meaningful impacts on the lives of those who have served our country.

We are incredibly proud to announce the completion of a significant milestone in our mission—the \$7 million renovation and expansion of Richards House, our homeless shelter. This project, a labor of love that spanned three years of tireless fundraising and effort, is a testament to our determination to provide more than just a roof over our veterans' heads. We set out to create a space that is not only beautiful but also functional, a true sanctuary for those in need of shelter, support, and a path forward.

The transformation of Richards House is fantastic! We have increased our capacity from 30 beds to 46, ensuring that more veterans can find a safe haven during their time of need. But the impact goes beyond numbers. The newly renovated space is designed to foster a sense of community, healing, and hope. Every detail, from the layout of the rooms to the shared spaces, was carefully considered to enhance the experience of our residents and support their journey toward independence and stability.

This expansion is a reflection of our commitment to dig deeper—whether it's in the physical spaces we create, the services we provide, or the relationships we build with the veterans we serve. We understand that the issues our veterans face are complex and multifaceted, and we are dedicated to addressing them with the depth of care and expertise they deserve.

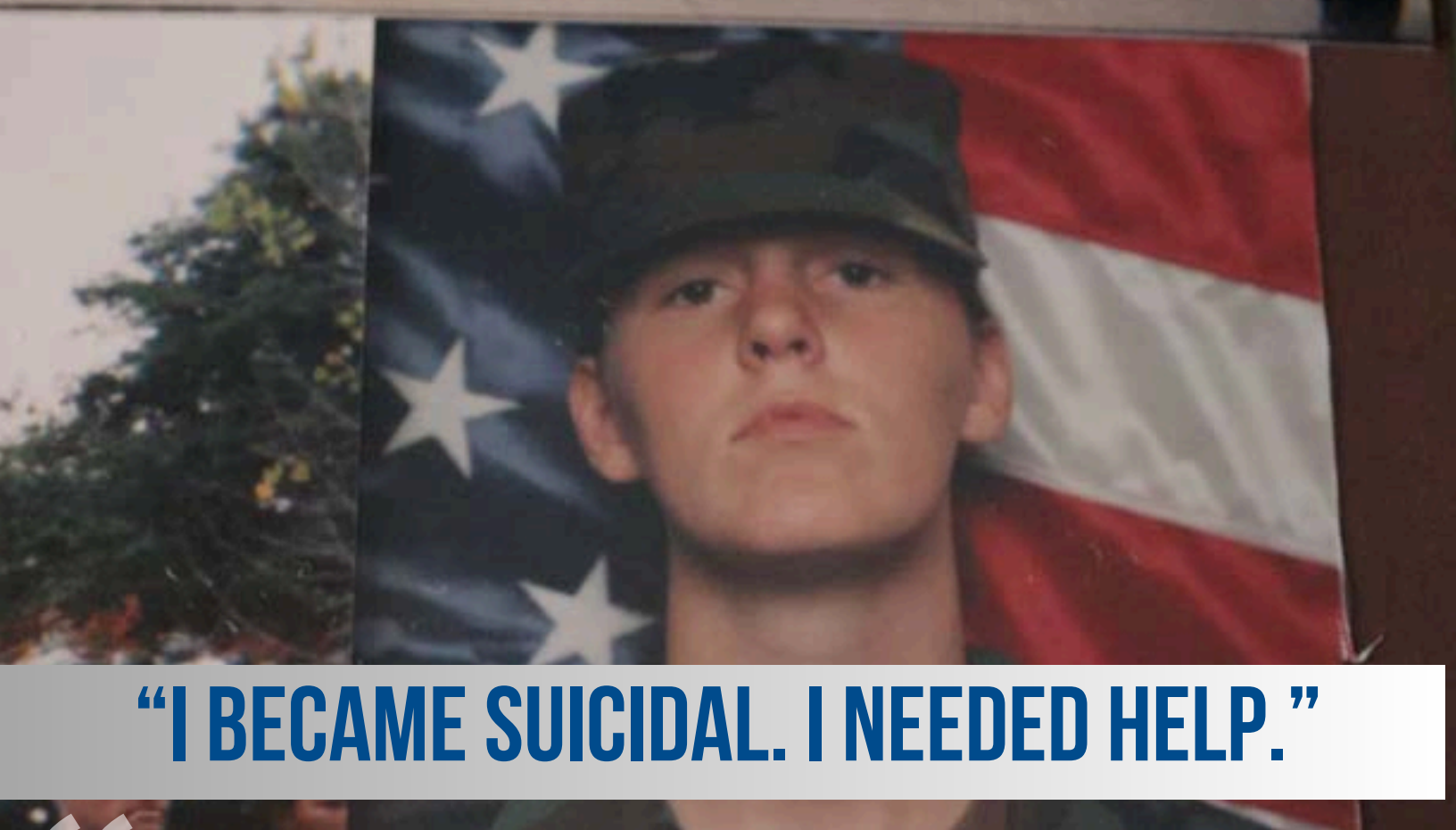
As we look to the future, we remain steadfast in our mission to serve those who have served us. We will continue to dig deeper, to reach higher, and to strive for excellence in all that we do. The success of the Richards House project is a shining example of what we can achieve together, and it is only the beginning. With your support, we will continue to make a lasting difference in the lives of our veterans, ensuring they receive the respect, care, and opportunities they have earned.

Thank you for standing with us in this important work. Together, we are making a difference—one veteran at a time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Laura A. Heltz".

Laura Heltz
Executive Director
US Army Veteran



“I BECAME SUICIDAL. I NEEDED HELP.”

I enlisted on September 6, 2001,” said U.S. Army veteran Mara Budd. Her mother had concerns about Mara joining the military, but Mara reassured her. “Mom, we’re at peace,” she recalled saying. Just five days later, the world would be changed forever by the terrorist attacks of September 11.

For Mara, deployment didn’t come immediately after boot camp. “I was stationed in Germany, which was amazing,” she said. “Then, of course, we got orders to go to Iraq.” In 2003, she became one of the first ground troops to enter the country. “Our job was fueling helicopters,” she explained.

Mara and her husband at the time had plans to move to Mississippi after their service in Iraq, but Hurricane Katrina destroyed the town they intended to settle in. “We had to change our plans on the fly,” Mara said. They eventually decided to move to Rochester, New York, where they had family.

Over time, Mara began experiencing severe mobility issues.

“I was diagnosed with fibromyalgia,” she said, attributing her declining health to frequent exposure to toxic burn pits in Iraq.

“I became suicidal; I needed help,” Mara shared. After separating from her husband, she found herself crashing on friends’ couches throughout the Rochester area. It was through Eagle Star Housing that she found stable housing, which ultimately led her to the Veterans Outreach Center (VOC).

“VOC helped me in so many ways,” she said. “They gave me a bus pass, food from the pantry—even dog food. They offer suicide awareness classes, which were incredibly helpful. You can get your hair done, do your laundry, and join the women’s group. There’s so much support for veterans here, and I wouldn’t be where I am without it.”

All of VOC’s services are free for veterans. If you or someone you know is struggling with thoughts of suicide, call 988 for help. The VOC also offers the Steve Preston Peer Connection Center, where veterans can talk to staff trained in military culture, relax, and connect with others.



MISSION/VALUES

MISSION

To serve veterans with compassion and advocate for all who have worn our nation's uniform so they can RISE and live life to the fullest.

ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES

Respect: We treat everyone with dignity and compassion, and we show appreciation for strengths as well as vulnerabilities.

Integrity: We are trustworthy, honorable and professional. Taking ownership of our actions and communication is a top priority; we do this by conveying honesty and respect through tone, verbal and non-verbal interactions. We demonstrate fiscal responsibility with all resources.

Service: We recognize the great sacrifices that are made by all who have worn our nation's uniform. We are committed to serving our veterans and their families with passion and deep appreciation.

Excellence: We are hard-working, innovative, and creative; we strive for continuous improvement. Our goal is to consistently grow the quality and scope of our services in order to better meet the needs of our veterans.



OUR SERVICES



EMPLOYMENT PLACEMENT AND TRAINING

- Vocational Assessments
- Interview skills training
- Career counseling
- Resume preparation
- OSHA certifications



SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

- Case management
- Female veteran programming
- Senior veteran services
- Veterans Treatment Court
- Social activities



HEALTH AND WELLNESS

- Hydromassage
- Laundry
- Crisis Intervention
- Reiki
- Suicide Prevention
- Fitness Center
- Peer Groups
- Outdoor Programs



QUARTERMASTER

- Food pantry with fresh meat and dairy products
- Clothing (including professional attire)
- Essential items
- Pet food
- Baby formula



RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS

- Brand new, state-of-the-art 46 bed emergency housing facility
- 8 bed transitional housing program
- 33 units of permanent, affordable housing



ONSITE COMMUNITY PARTNERS

- Legal counseling
- Financial coaching
- Accredited VA benefits counseling
- Free bus passes
- Higher education support

THE GENEROSITY OF OUR SUPPORTERS ENSURES WE ARE ABLE TO CONTINUE OUR IMPORTANT WORK.
TO SEE A COMPLETE LIST OF DONORS, PLEASE VISIT [VOCROC.ORG/DONOR-LIST](https://vocroc.org/donor-list)

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

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**Connotes veteran status*

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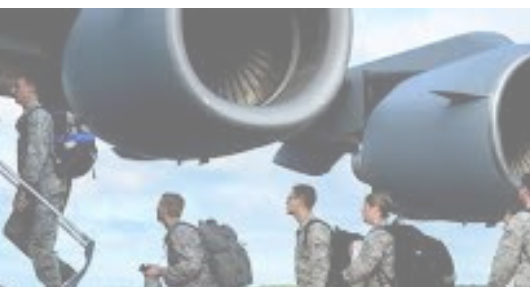
Alec Andrest*

DIRECTOR OF ADVANCEMENT

Joan Brandenburg, CFRE

CHIEF OF STAFF

Haylee Horn





PROGRAMS

At the Veterans Outreach Center, our mission to serve veterans is deeply rooted in honoring their sacrifices and ensuring they have access to the support they deserve. In 2023, we were thrilled to welcome 483 new veterans into our programs, helping them navigate their unique challenges. This milestone underscores the importance of our outreach efforts, which are essential in connecting with veterans who may not yet realize the resources available to them. By attending as many events as possible in the six county region of Monroe, Genesee, Livingston, Ontario, Orleans and Wayne, we reach those in need, ensuring no veteran is left behind and that each has the opportunity to thrive after service.

483	New Vets Served
1,605	Returning Vets Served
202	Female Vets Served
316	Outreach Events

We were also incredibly proud to reopen our Richards House Homeless Shelter after the successful completion of a \$7M capital campaign. Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, the facility is now fully paid for and offers a welcoming, dignified space for veterans in need. With 46 beds, private rooms, private baths, and stunning common areas, the new Richards House provides a home-like environment where veterans can rebuild their lives. An industrial kitchen, all-new mechanical systems, and an elevator ensure modern comfort and accessibility, making this facility a true sanctuary for those who have served our country.



HEALTH AND WELLNESS

At Veterans Outreach Center, the health and wellness of our veterans is a top priority. We understand that veterans face unique physical, emotional, and psychological challenges, and our comprehensive services are designed to meet these diverse needs. Our crisis intervention programs provide immediate support in times of urgent need, helping veterans navigate difficult situations. Outdoor programs offer opportunities for physical activity, camaraderie, and mental rejuvenation, while peer support groups create safe spaces for veterans to share experiences and find solidarity. Buddy checks ensure that no veteran feels isolated, offering a lifeline to those struggling with loneliness or mental health challenges.

Additionally, our quartermaster program had a profound impact in 2023, with veterans utilizing the service more than 3,000 times to access essential food and clothing. For many veterans, these basic necessities can be difficult to secure, especially during times of financial or personal hardship. By providing these resources, we help relieve the stress of daily survival, allowing veterans to focus on their recovery, personal growth, and reintegration into civilian life. The combination of health and wellness services, peer support, and tangible aid forms a vital safety net, empowering veterans to build healthier, more stable futures.

1,227 Vets participated in Behavioral Health Programs

3,578 Quartermaster Uses

2,681 Buddy Checks, Crisis Intervention episodes, and Peer support group participants



EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING SERVICES

Finding employment after military service can be a significant challenge for many veterans. The transition from military to civilian life often requires adapting skills learned in service to fit the demands of the civilian job market. Veterans may struggle with translating their military experience into language that resonates with employers, and gaps in their employment history can add further obstacles. Additionally, some veterans face physical or mental health challenges that make finding and maintaining employment even more difficult.

The employment and training programs at Veterans Outreach Center are critical in helping veterans overcome these hurdles. We offer personalized support, assisting veterans in updating their skills and creating resumes that effectively showcase their strengths and experiences. Many veterans come to us for help long after their service, realizing that they need assistance in staying competitive in an evolving job market. Our dedicated staff works closely with each veteran to build confidence, develop interview skills, and explore career options that align with their goals.

In 2023 alone, we helped 178 veterans find, secure, and retain meaningful employment. This not only provides financial stability but also instills a renewed sense of purpose and belonging. Through our programs, we empower veterans to rebuild their lives and thrive in their post-service careers.

178 Vets obtained jobs

270 Vets participated in Trainings *786 Times*

18 Vets placed in permanent housing

227 Vets enrolled in Homeless Veteran Reintegration Program



RESIDENTIAL SERVICES

Providing safe, stable housing for veterans in need is a cornerstone of our mission at Veterans Outreach Center. A home is more than just a roof over one's head—it's a foundation for rebuilding lives. Unfortunately, many veterans find themselves in need of emergency housing due to factors such as financial hardship, mental health challenges, or a lack of family support. Some may struggle with the transition from military to civilian life, while others might face substance abuse or post-traumatic stress disorder, making it difficult to maintain stable housing on their own.

At VOC, we offer more than just a place to stay—we provide comprehensive programs to help veterans address the underlying challenges that led to homelessness. Our dedicated staff works with each individual to set achievable goals, offering support through counseling, job training, financial education, and life skills coaching. These tailored programs give veterans the tools they need to regain stability and independence.

In 2023, we saw remarkable success, with 69% of veterans leaving our homeless shelter having met all of their goals and transitioning into permanent housing. This achievement reflects the transformative impact of our programs, as we work to ensure that veterans not only find housing but truly feel at home.

94

Vets Served in VOC residential facilities

59

Vets provided with emergency and transitional housing

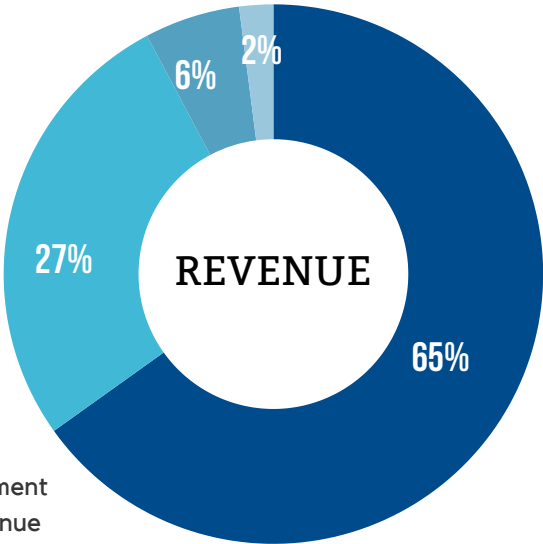
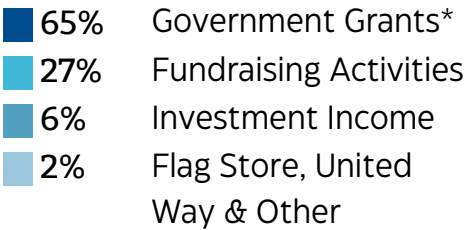
69%

Positive discharge rate from emergency housing

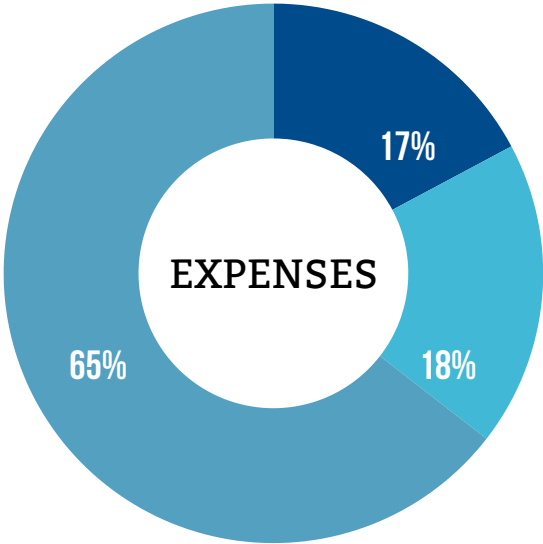
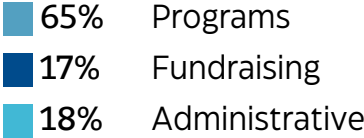
35

Vets served in permanent supportive housing

FINANCIAL SUMMARY



*2023 was part of a capital campaign year, so government grants represented a larger than usual portion of revenue



TOTAL REVENUE: \$4,993,501
TOTAL EXPENSES: \$4,212,448
NET REVENUE: \$781,053*

*Net revenue reflects additional funds raised to support the capital renovation of Richard’s House homeless shelter

WHY INVEST IN VETS?



"Our veterans are such a fabric of our freedom for their sacrifices and their commitments. It is my belief that our veterans deserve more respect and honor than we as a country has shown them in the past. I support the VOC to give the veterans they serve hope for each new day, the opportunity to bond with fellow veterans and the choice to achieve their future goals."

Carol Preston - Donor, Steve Preston Peer Connection Center

"Sage Rutty & Company is proud to support Rochester-area veterans through our work with Veterans Outreach Center. The services they provide are critical in helping the men and women who served our country bravely. We support the VOC not only for the work they do, but also in the hope that our work with the organization will inspire other local businesses to get involved."

-Trevor Holly - President, Sage Rutty



"LeChase proudly supports the Veterans Outreach Center as an effective way to honor and assist the men and women who have selflessly put our country ahead of their own personal pursuits. All of us benefit from the freedoms they served to protect, and we thank the VOC for its efforts to ensure our veterans continue to have access to resources they need back home."

-William H. Goodrich - CEO & Managing Partner, LeChase Construction

"I've been asked numerous times why I'm so dedicated to helping veterans and why with Veterans Outreach Center. It's a pretty simple answer for me. Being a veteran, particularly a Vietnam war veteran, I recognize the significant sacrifices veterans have made. I've lived them. I recognize the often mental health and physical disability challenges veterans deal with upon separation from their service responsibilities. Serving on VOC's board of directors has been my conduit to helping support veterans, both financially and morally, through VOC's mission. VOC helps me reflect my gratitude and give back in a way that honors their commitment and sacrifices."

-Don Reeve - VOC Board Member, US Army Veteran



"There is no greater source of essential support and care for our veterans in the Greater Rochester area. Our VOC leads the way just like our vets."

-Patrick S. Miller, PhD. - Producer of "Rochester Guitars for Heroes"

**ON BEHALF OF VOC,
WE SALUTE OUR VETERANS**



VETERANS OUTREACH CENTER, INC.

447 South Ave

Rochester, NY 14620



MAKE YOUR GIFT TODAY.

Your gift could be the difference in a
veteran's life.

vocroc.org

