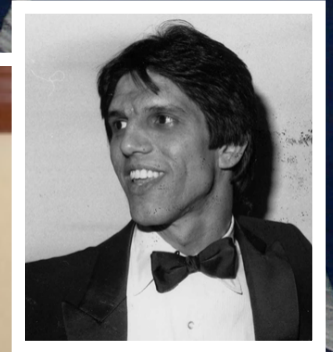


Spring/Summer 2023

The Veteran Advocate

News and information from the nation's oldest community-based nonprofit organization serving veterans

VOC CELEBRATES 50 YEARS!



1973 ★ 2023

VETERANS
OUTREACH CENTER Inc.
★ Serving Those Who Serve U.S. ★

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

447 SOUTH AVE., ROCHESTER, NY 14620 | 585.546.1081 | VOCROC.ORG

A MESSAGE FROM THE
Executive Director

Dear Friends and Supporters,

This year marks the 50th anniversary of Veterans Outreach Center, and I am excited and honored to celebrate with all of you! This is my sixth year serving as Executive Director, and over that time I have witnessed veterans, supporters, staff, board members, and the community as a whole rally around each other and help us provide critically needed services for local veterans. It has been a truly incredible experience.

Since our inception in 1973, Veterans Outreach Center has a rich and vibrant history that, at times, came with its share of struggles. However, our founders and those who support us remained steadfast in their commitment to serving veterans and their families, and we have never wavered in our belief that all veterans deserve access to the support and resources they need to thrive. No matter the challenges we or our fellow veterans faced, we have been here to serve as a guiding light and make certain that no veteran is left behind.

Today, we stand proud of our achievements and the many lives we have touched over the years. We have continued to grow our suite of services as we further learned the needs of those we serve. Most importantly, we have witnessed veterans overcome incredible obstacles and achieve success in their personal and professional lives. To see the brave men and women who served our country, with a helping hand from us, realize and embrace their true potential, makes me even more proud to be part of this organization.

As we reflect on the past 50 years, we are also looking to the future – We know that there is still work to be done. Many veterans continue to face significant challenges, from homelessness and unemployment to struggles with emotional and behavioral health. Unfortunately, suicide still has a grip on veterans at an alarming rate – and even one suicide is too many. The path ahead of us, in some ways, is clearly laid out, and we remain committed to doing everything in our power to serve those who served U.S.

In closing, I'd like to extend my deepest gratitude to all the supporters, donors, board members, and employees who have made our work possible over the years. 50 years – five decades! – is an achievement worth celebrating, and we couldn't have accomplished this milestone without you. Here's to another 50 years!

Sincerely,

Laura A. Stradley

Laura Stradley
Executive Director
Veterans Outreach Center
U.S. Army Veteran



VETERANS
OUTREACH CENTER Inc.
★ Serving Those Who Serve U.S. ★

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

RIPPED FROM THE HEADLINES! VOC TURNS 50

The following is an article published in the RBJ on March 10, 2023

VETERANS OUTREACH CENTER CELEBRATES 50 YEARS OF SERVICE TO LOCAL VETERANS

By: Andrea Deckert March 8, 2023

The Veterans Outreach Center (VOC) is used to overcoming challenges.

The VOC was initially founded in 1973 as the Veterans Outreach Project under the non-profit organization Action for a Better Community with funding from Congress.

When the government ended that program, however, local Vietnam veterans knew that there had to be a way to maintain those services.

So, in 1979 the Veterans Outreach Project became the Veterans Outreach Center, where the sole mission was to help veterans in need.

Despite off-and-on funding challenges over the last half century, the VOC has not only remained in operation but also significantly expanded its footprint to now serve over 1,500 men and women each year.

This year the VOC is celebrating its 50th year in operation.

Laura Stradley, executive director of the VOC and a U.S. Army veteran, said part of the center's longevity can be attributed to strong community partnerships and securing sustainable sources of funding.

"We've always been passionate about our mission," she said.

The VOC offers a range of support for veterans across the Finger Lakes, including job training programs, employment assistance, mental health support, a fitness center, hydromassage, a barbershop, social clubs and therapeutic groups, housing for homeless veterans and low-income veteran families, food and clothing, free RTS bus passes, an emergency fund and case management for veterans that are justice-involved.

All services are delivered at no cost to veterans.

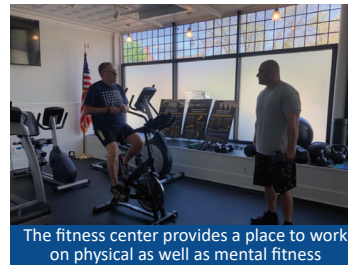
The organization has a roughly \$4 million operating budget and nearly 50 employees.

Stradley said the organization is always adjusting to the market and filling in the gaps.

"We find ways to meet the need," she said.

For example, the VOC — as part of a joint venture with Conifer Realty — created the first affordable housing complex for veterans in the region, called Liberty Landing on Scio Street.

Last year, the VOC unveiled an expansion of program offerings for local veterans with the opening of the Fitness Center at VOC.



The fitness center provides a place to work on physical as well as mental fitness

As part of its health and wellness services, the fitness center provides a space where veterans can decompress, get in a good workout and connect with other veterans, Stradley said, noting the center is

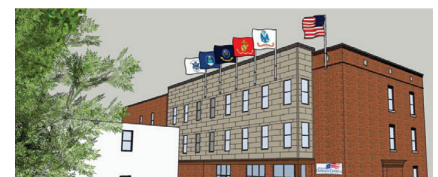
designed to be individualized and welcoming to veterans of all fitness levels.

Earlier this year, the VOC broke ground on a roughly \$7 million upgrade and expansion project at the Richards House, a residence for homeless veterans located in the South Wedge. It is the organization's largest capital project to date.

The renovations to Richards House are part of the VOC's Operation Safe Haven campaign, which is focused on creating additional transitional and emergency housing units. The expansion there will increase the number of beds for homeless veterans.

The project will also include adding an elevator for the three-story building, expanded laundry and common spaces and additional bathrooms.

In addition, there will be more privacy with a shift from four- to six-person bays to single- and double-occupancy rooms.



Rendering of Richards House, dedicated to housing homeless veterans, in Rochester's South Wedge

Continued on next page

Among the upcoming challenges for the organization is finding ways to have more face-to-face interactions with veterans, Stradley said.

She noted that people are now opting for more virtual interactions, and, as a result, visiting American Legion halls and VFW locations less frequently. That lack of in-person communication can lead to isolation, which has shown to impact mental health, Stradley said.

Bail reform laws also create unintended consequences for veterans because while the change reduces or eliminates the chance of jail time, it often deters vets from seeking the help they may need when dealing with challenges ranging from job training to addiction treatment.

Despite challenges for a small portion of the population, Stradley said the majority of veterans continue to show they are assets to a workplace.

She said veterans have several skills learned on the field that translate to the workplace, noting they are team players, mission focused, trainable and adaptable.

“They bring a tremendous value to the workplace,” she said. “The level of commitment they can bring to a company is unparalleled.”

adeckert@bridgetowermedia.com / (585) 653-4021

VISIT VOCROC.ORG TO WATCH OUR 50TH ANNIVERSARY “THROUGHOUT THE YEARS” VIDEO

EMPOWERING WOMEN VETERANS AT VOC



Giovanna Gutierrez is a third-generation Army veteran and the case manager for woman veterans at Veterans Outreach Center. While stationed in Fort Hood, Texas, she was part of the chemical reconnaissance platoon and deployed during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Giovanna was raised in San Francisco and has called Rochester her home for 14 years. “When I first came to Rochester, VOC was one of the first stops I made. The staff walked me through the process to get connected with VA services and provided me with resources for education and job hunting. Now, as a case manager, I am able to pay it forward and help veterans just like I was helped.”

Under Giovanna’s leadership, the Women Veterans Program is in full gear as the unique needs of women are met. VOC hosted a women veterans luncheon to help kick off their program year. The goal is to continue the momentum of visibility and appreciation at VOC for our women veterans who have served our country.

If you are or know a women veteran, please contact Giovanna, VOC Case Manager/Women Veterans Program Coordinator, for more information at Giovanna.Gutierrez@vocroc.org or call 585.295.7801.

NAVIGATING LIFE AFTER SERVICE: A MARINE CORP. VETERAN'S INSPIRING JOURNEY



Keith G. enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in 2003 and served in Iraq. After leaving the military in 2015, he began to experience symptoms of PTSD, causing depression and feelings of helplessness.

"PTSD has been a term for a lot longer than this conflict was going on, but you weren't hearing anyone being labeled with it," Keith said. "I just didn't know what I was worth anymore. Everything I wanted just wasn't attainable."

Once Keith found Veterans Outreach Center, things started looking up.

Through VOC's Veterans Treatment Court Program, Keith met with the team who helped him navigate his way through his challenges. Keith had been in a chemical dependency group at the VA, but with VOC's help, he found an additional path for his healing.

"I keep coming back once a month, and being accountable for my own wellness paved a road to my own healing."

Keith is now an active member of VOC and sees it as his go-to place to help him become a better version of himself. "To me, VOC means when I'm ready to do better I come here first and see what path is open to me. VOC has many doors of opportunity that can be opened. You just have to want it!"

Keith's story of resilience and hope is inspiring, and Veterans Outreach Center is proud to be able to serve veterans like him and help them on their way to success. To learn more about VOC's program offerings, visit www.vocroc.org.



VOC WELCOMES NEW BOARD MEMBERS

JAMES MAGEE

President/CEO, Paradigm Environmental Services

***SEAN MCNAMARA**

CFO, East House

YASHIRA RODRIGUEZ

Talent Strategy Manager, Greater Rochester Chamber of Commerce

***DR. PETER ZARNOWSKI**

PHD Psychologist

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

***ELLEN ADAMS, CHAIR**

Red Hot Dish

***DON REEVE, VICE CHAIR**

Retired, Wegmans Food Markets

BERNARD SCHROEDER, TREASURER

Lake Beverage Corporation

JOSEPH CATONE, SECRETARY

USA Payroll Agency

JESSIE GREGORIO, SPECIAL COUNSEL

University of Rochester

***MATTHEW LEGERE**

Harris Communications

***MARVIN PATTERSON JR.**

Monroe County Sheriff's Department

***DYLAN POTTER**

Howe & Rusling

***CHIEF FABIAN RIVERA**

Macedon P.D.

JOSEPH ROBACH

Former State Senator & Veterans Advocate

*Veteran

2022 EVENTS RECAP & SAVE THE DATE!



FLAG DAY - JUNE 11 - 14, 2022

Volunteers across Rochester distributed hand-held American flags and collected donations at businesses across Rochester in support of services at VOC. Thank you to everyone who donated!

Save the Date! Saturday, June 10th - Wednesday, June 14th, 2023



GOLF FORE VETS - JULY 25, 2022

Golfers spent the day on the greens of Midvale Country Club in support of critically needed services for local veterans at VOC, followed by dinner and a presentation. Thank you to everyone who came out!

Save the Date! Monday, July 24th, 2023



POUND THE GROUND - AUGUST 24, 2022

Hosted virtually and in-person, the 2022 Pound the Ground Run/Walk 5K was a success! Participants ran and walked to show their support for local veterans. And congratulations to the U.S. Army who won the coveted Golden Boot award!

Save the Date! Wednesday, August 23rd, 2023



A STARS & STRIPES CELEBRATION- NOVEMBER 4, 2022

A Stars & Stripes Celebration is a powerful and moving tribute to remember, honor, and celebrate the brave men and women who served our country, and this year's event was no different. Thank you to everyone who came out to recognize our nation's heroes.

Save the Date! Friday, November 3rd, 2023



HOPE FOR HEROES TELETHON - NOVEMBER 11, 2022

VOC's Hope for Heroes Telethon shares the stories of the veterans who came to VOC looking for help - and found it. This year's event highlighted important stories of heroes who overcame life's challenges and are now thriving. Thank you to everyone who supported this important event!

Save the Date! Thursday, November 9th, 2023



VOC WELCOMES FUNDRAISING & DONOR SPECIALIST TO THE TEAM

Michele Martell has a Master of Business Administration with a focus on marketing from Walsh College in Troy, Michigan. Originally from Cleveland, Ohio, she has lived across the U.S. and overseas, and has a strong background in sales and writing. Michele has also worked as a Department of Defense civilian, contractor, and volunteer on several military installations. During her off-time, Michele enjoys music, volunteering at the city animal shelter, working-out at the gym, and spending time with her kids and rescue dogs who reside with her in Irondequoit.

Contact Michele today for event sponsorships and opportunities to support our veterans: Michele.Martell@vocroc.org or call 585.295.7824.

YOUR SUPPORT MATTERS!

Every time you donate to VOC, you are helping a veteran and their family get the help they need. Through your generosity, you can change a life. Through a small act of kindness, you may even save a life.

- In-Kind (clothing, food items, etc.)
- Financial support and NFTs (vocroc.org)
- Volunteer
- Join our Support Force and become a monthly contributor!

To learn more about these opportunities, contact Joan.Brandenburg@vocroc.org or call 585.295.7821.



SHOP 24/7 AT
EFLAGSTORE.COM

STARS & STRIPES
THE FLAG STORE
★ A Project of Veterans Outreach Center, Inc. ★

- MILITARY BRANCH APPAREL
- CUSTOM FLAGS FOR ALL OCCASIONS
- FIRE/FIRST RESPONDER & POLICE APPAREL
- FLAGS & ACCESSORIES
- HOME DECOR & MORE



VETERANS
OUTREACH CENTER Inc.
★ Serving Those Who Serve U.S. ★[®]

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

**447 SOUTH AVE.,
ROCHESTER, NY 14620
585.546.1081
VOCROC.ORG**