

# PRESS RELEASE

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## **For Immediate Release**

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## **HOMELESS VETERANS RECEIVE ASSISTANCE AT EL PASO 'STAND DOWN' EVENT**

*October 14th event offers a link to survival for hundreds of  
individuals on the streets*

(DENVER) – Homeless veterans from across El Paso county were provided an array of goods and services at the twelfth annual El Paso County Stand Down that was held yesterday at the City Auditorium in Colorado Springs.

“This year’s event provided attendees with flu and pneumonia shots, sleeping bags, lunch and access to a broad range of necessities,” says Department of Labor and Employment Veterans Representative Elaine Edon. “The day offered food, clothing, medical, legal and mental health assistance, job counseling and referral, and most importantly, companionship and camaraderie.”

Edon is President of the Homeless Veteran Coalition, a community-based intervention program that staged the event. More than 140 homeless veterans attended the five and a half hour “Stand Down” (which takes its name from a military term. In times of war, exhausted combat units were removed from the battlefields to a place of relative security and safety. Those troops were said to be in a “stand down” mode.) Transportation was provided, delivering homeless veterans from locations around town to the City Auditorium where 12 government and non-profit groups were set up to provide services. Job counselors and employment specialists from the Pikes Peak Workforce Center were there to assist those interested in moving toward self-sufficiency.

More than 90 volunteers from the Air Force, Navy and Army were there as well, acting as “escorts.” The homeless veterans were each assigned an escort who accompanied

them to all the service booths and clothing stations, helped them fill out any required paperwork and had lunch with them. The Stand Down organizers recognized that attendees certainly needed a meal and they needed socks but they also needed something more. They appreciated simply having someone to talk with. The homeless are not only forgotten in urban America, they are usually not even seen. The military volunteers helped address that invisibility if only for a few hours.

An event of this magnitude would not have been possible without an entire community pitching in. Generous support from local businesses included Easy Street Design who printed flyers at no cost to publicize the event. Wal\*Mart provided jackets, jeans and shoes. Big 5 Sporting Goods donated boots and Burlington Coat Factory added jackets to the stacks of clothing given away. Tony and Guy Cosmetology Academy offered the services of seven stylists who gave free haircuts and American Red Cross provided shampoo, lotion, socks and shower slippers. Lunch was made possible through donations from Auto Plaza Tech, Home Front Cares and Basque Brothers Plumbing. And even the venue for the Stand Down was offered free of charge. The Homeless Veteran Coalition presented Mayor Lionel Rivera with an award in recognition of that important contribution.

Edon is realistic about what the Stand Down can accomplish. “Can we help everybody with a job? No, we can’t,” she says. “Many have major barriers to employment. About 45% of homeless veterans suffer from mental illnesses and, with considerable overlap, about 70% suffer from alcohol or drug abuse problems.”

She says staff helped as many as they could at yesterday’s Stand Down and threw out a life-line to those who were ready for more long-term assistance. The goal is to get as many as possible to a point where they are at least job ready. “We end up with a very small percentage that are employable,” she admits, “but even one veteran with a job is one less veteran on the streets. For the others, depending on their needs, we had services and assistance to help them as well. Our emphasis is on providing an environment in which everyone is treated with respect, given support and afforded the opportunity to connect with whatever services they need most.”

About one-third of the adult homeless population in the United States have served their country in the Armed Services. Most of them are veterans from the Vietnam era. The number of homeless Vietnam era veterans is greater than the number of soldiers who died during the war in Southeast Asia. The Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that on any given day in this country, as many as 250,000 veterans (male and female) are living on the streets or in shelters, and perhaps twice as many experience homelessness at some point during the course of a year. There are an estimated 500 veterans living on the streets in the Colorado Springs area alone.

“We were proud to be a part of the El Paso County Stand Down,” says Department of Labor and Employment Executive Donald J. Mares. “This annual event transforms the despair and immobility of homelessness into the momentum necessary for many of the

participants to get into recovery, to resolve legal issues, to seek employment, to access health services and benefits, to reconnect with the community and get off the street.”

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Stylists from Tony and Guy Cosmetology Academy pose with one of the many homeless veterans who took advantage of the free haircuts they offered.



An assembly line of volunteers getting everyone fed at the twelfth annual Stand Down in Colorado Springs