

LocalNews

Welcome Home Warrior social worker honored

Pat Hill

phill@ccnewspapers.com

Known for her compassion for combat veterans, Donna Finicle, founder of Welcome Home Warrior, recently was named Regional Social Worker of the Year.

The award was given by the National Association of Social Workers in the Pikes Peak Region.

"I was struck by the fact that Donna came out of retirement to develop this nonprofit organization to address a specific need for our soldiers and their families," said Leslie Stillwell, who nominated Finicle for the honor. "She is a very dynamic and self-less woman."

In the business of helping people for 42 years, Finicle is driven by her concern for soldiers returning home with injuries and illnesses.

"We're just seeing the beginning of it as more soldiers come home this year. The police are seeing more family violence and we know there is a lot of divorce going on," Finicle said. "It's just really tough for these young families to deal with. And the poor young woman who is home alone trying to manage everything while waiting to hear if her husband is going to make it back or not."

Finicle opened the first Veterans Administration (now Veterans Affairs) mental-health clinic in Colorado



Donna Finicle recently was named Social Worker of the Year by the National Association of Social Workers, Colorado Chapter, Pikes Peak Region. Photo by Pat Hill

in 1981 and the first such clinic in Alamosa in 2003.

"There are so many veterans down there, generation after generation in the valley; it's a tradition," she said, referring to the San Luis Valley where she was part of traveling team delivering services to veterans. "We developed huge case loads. It was an extraordinary experience. I loved it."

In 2007, Finicle tried to retire in Woodland Park but threw in the towel to start the nonprofit organization, Welcome Home Warrior.

"I came out of retirement

because I was concerned about the lack of services for soldiers and their families," she said.

In working with soldiers and veterans, Finicle is strengthened by empathy and compassion for the men and women in the Armed Forces.

"It's important to know something about combat-related stress problems," she said. "Consequently, I thought I could share my experience — I have lots of it — and establish a kind of safety net for the outlying areas."

Beginning with weekend workshops for soldiers, Finicle enlarged the vision to include family retreats.

"So far, I've found one foundation to help the organization and that one was based in Oklahoma. The board understood what we were doing and thought it was a good idea," she said.

Bob Powell, licensed clinical social worker, donates his time to train Welcome Home Warrior volunteers working with suicidal veterans.

"Donna started with nothing, using her own money; she has a small grant but still has limited funds," he said. "I do everything I can to support her; I like what she's doing. She's done everything right. I just hope she gets more support."

This month, Finicle and her team of volunteers opened an office at 471 S. Baldwin, Suite A, in Woodland Park.

"We want to help these people who are coming back with a lot of problems from multiple tours of combat. Some of them have brain damage. When somebody with brain damage comes home, he's a stranger," she said. "We just want to provide help sooner for them to deal with these problems."

For information, call 719-687-1000.

"We're available if there's a crisis and they need resources," she said.