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VA Announces Campaign to Increase Veterans' Economic Potential in Colorado Springs

Colorado Springs — The Veterans Economic Communities Initiative, an effort led by the Department of Veterans Affairs to promote economic success for Veterans in partnership with local communities, was officially launched in Colorado Springs today at a kickoff event hosted by the El Polmar Foundation.

Colorado Springs is one of the first 25 communities planned to launch in 2015, with 25 more slated for launch in 2016. The campaign is part of Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald's department-wide transformation called MyVA, which is dedicated to putting Veterans at the center of everything VA does.

"Veterans are invaluable assets to our country," said Terrance McWilliams, Vice President of Military and Veteran Affairs at the El Polmar Foundation. "When they succeed, our communities are stronger, our economy is more robust, and our nation is more competitive. The Veterans Economic Communities Initiative fosters collaboration and teamwork at local and national levels to increase economic and education opportunities for our nation's bravest, brightest men and women."

The Veterans Economic Communities Initiative was launched on Monday, May 18, 2015 at the Frontiers of Flight Museum in Dallas, TX. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald was joined by Dallas Mayor Mike Rawlings, Medal of Honor Recipient Kyle White and key industry figures to kick off the campaign.

"The best way to get things done for Veterans is to involve partners from both the public and private sectors – national to local," said McDonald. "If history has shown us anything, it's that all you have to do is give Veterans an opportunity and they will go beyond anything you could ever envision."

The goal of the Veterans Economic Communities Initiative is improve economic outcomes for America's Veterans by bringing together local and national partners to coordinate services at the local level. The campaign includes a VA Economic Liaison in each community who will expand and

encourage collaboration among private and public organizations that offer resources related to education, training and employment. Through strategic partnerships, and by offering Veterans innovative forms of learning and employment opportunities, these communities will help Veterans gain competitive career skills and knowledge in locally in-demand fields.

National campaign partners include the departments of Defense and Labor, the Small Business Administration, and national nonprofits, businesses and educators. A number of organizations local to the Colorado Springs area partnered to launch and build community support for the campaign, including the Mt. Carmel Center for Excellence, the El Polmar Foundation, the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, the Peak Military Care Network, the Colorado Springs Business Alliance and the Colorado Springs Small Business Development Center.

The first 25 communities were chosen based on transitioning Servicemember and Post-9/11 Veteran populations; unemployment, employment opportunity and job growth; and education spending.

Communities participating in the Veterans Economic Communities Initiative include:

Atlanta, Georgia	El Paso, Texas	Las Vegas, Nevada	New York, New York	San Antonio, Texas
Chicago, Illinois	Honolulu, Hawaii	Los Angeles, California	Norfolk, Virginia	San Diego, California
Cincinnati, Ohio	Houston, Texas	Louisville, Kentucky	Phoenix, Arizona	Seattle, Washington
Colorado Springs, Colorado	Jacksonville, Florida	Miami, Florida	Richmond, Virginia	St. Louis, Missouri
Dallas, Texas	Kansas City, Missouri	Nashville, Tennessee	Riverside, California	Washington, D.C.

Under the Veterans Economic Communities Initiative, Colorado Springs will develop a scalable, sustainable model over the next two years that includes:

- Developing ongoing public-private partnerships focused on employment and economic opportunities;
- Fostering employer networking and encouraging hiring commitments on the Veterans Employment Center™ (www.ebenefits.va.gov/jobs);
- Supporting events such as career fairs, job and employment summits, and roundtables to boost economic competitiveness for Veterans;
- Sharing best practices and training and supporting employers who are considering hiring Veterans; and

- Facilitating the development of learning or resource hubs to help connect Veterans to economic opportunities including entrepreneurship, credentialing and skills building.

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