



NEWS FROM:
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Public Defender Calling on Veterans to Serve as Volunteer Mentors in New Duval County Veterans Treatment Court

Jacksonville, FL (December 16, 2011): What began as a proposal from his office in early 2011, Fourth Judicial Circuit Public Defender Matt Shirk announces that a Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) is forming in Duval County. He credits cooperation and participation from multiple local, state and federal agencies for making this diversionary program become a reality.

VTC is a proven tool used in a growing number of jurisdictions around the country and is designed to assist in the adjudication of criminal charges facing former service men and women who have been accused of acting unlawfully due to service-related impairments (PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injury). Shirk says Jacksonville strives to be the 'most military friendly city in the United States' and the implementation of an infrastructure to rehabilitate Veterans who face criminal charges rather than continue to fill jails with those convicted is an important step.

"A critical component of a successful VTC is the availability of a large pool of committed and engaged 'Veteran Mentors,' said Shirk. "A primary reason for VTC success across the nation is the meticulous oversight and ongoing intrusive interaction between the 'Veteran Mentor' and his/her subject. Committed; active one-on-one support from a peer throughout a several month treatment process dramatically increases the likelihood that a VTC participant will remain in the program and improves the chances for sobriety and law-abiding behavior in the future."

The Public Defender is asking that individuals who are interested in serving in this capacity contact John Holzbaur in his office immediately (904/255-4886 or jsh@pd4.coj.net). Ideal candidates to serve as 'Veteran Mentors' must meet the following criteria:

- Exceptional combat or peace-time Veteran
- Willingness to reassume aspects of former military roles including; instructor, coach, facilitator, advisor, sponsor, and supporter
- Present resident of the Jacksonville metro area

Mr. Shirk indicated that an operational VTC for Duval County would not be possible without the dedication and commitment of the following: Chief Judge for the Fourth Judicial Circuit Don Moran, Joe Stelma and the staff at Court Administration, State Attorney Angela Corey, The City of Jacksonville, The Veteran's Administration and social service agencies who work in the criminal justice system.
