

## Press Releases

### Tempe begins dedicated Veterans Court as one of many initiatives to assist those who have served their country

Post Date: 09/17/2014 3:24 PM

Nikki Ripley

City of Tempe

480-350-8846

[nikki\\_ripley@tempe.gov](mailto:nikki_ripley@tempe.gov)

**Tempe, Arizona** - Tomorrow morning, when Retired Brigadier General and Pro Tem Judge Gregg Maxon calls the first session of Tempe Veterans Court to order, 15 U.S. military veterans are scheduled to take part in a unique opportunity to resolve their criminal violations and get help for problems that may be holding them back in civilian life.

Tempe is beginning the eighth Veterans Court in Arizona, an effort designed to prevent recurring violations and improve quality of life for veterans and their families. It is the second such court in Maricopa County.

The Veterans Court joins two other specialty efforts in Tempe, including a Mental Health Court and a regional consolidated Homeless Court. Tempe Municipal Court Presiding Judge MaryAnne Majestic said it's all part of Tempe's progressive nature.

"The City of Tempe has always been innovative in its approach to citywide issues and the Court system also embraces this philosophy," said Majestic. "The aim of the Court for establishing dockets that address these specific populations is to provide these offenders the support and structure they need to avoid further criminal behavior. These dockets involve collaboration among various members of the criminal justice groups, social service agencies, the Department of Veterans Affairs Justice Outreach program and Mercy Care Health Agencies."

Maxon said that most veterans the court will see successfully served their country but have encountered problems transitioning back after service. Violations the court may see include trespassing, disorderly conduct, public urination, assault, domestic violence or DUI. Frequently, traumatic brain injury or post-traumatic stress disorder are underlying issues behind self-medication and illegal behaviors.

"Military folks are not inclined to ask for help. They think it's a sign of weakness," he said. "For a lot of them, this is the first time they are confronting the reality that they need help."

#### Getting back on track

Veterans who are willing and whose cases are appropriate will get referred to the Tempe Veterans Court upon their initial arraignment. They will come to the court regularly and be expected to fulfill obligations assigned by Maxon, including things like mandatory counseling or treatment programs. If they comply and make progress throughout the process, their offenses may be resolved with decreased or waived jail time or fines. Program "graduates" will rotate out as new offenders will be given opportunities to take part.

Before each monthly court session, confidential pre-meetings will take place with Maxon, the court's public defender, the court's prosecutor, a Department of Veterans Affairs representative and social services

---

representatives. They will discuss each veteran's unique circumstances and progress. Each veteran defendant then has an appointed time to meet with Maxon in the open courtroom.

Maxon, a lawyer and veteran of the Army, Navy and Army National Guard, has assisted other Arizona jurisdictions in setting up veterans courts. He has observed that veterans tend to thrive in the structure of these dedicated programs, having served for years in regimented environments with tasks, deadlines and expectations.

"We're talking about some very solid citizens and what they need is an opportunity to get on the right path," he said. "The goal is to get them to be a law-abiding, sober, productive taxpaying citizen. Success is not seeing them again in the court system."

The Mental Health Court and Veterans Court are housed within the Tempe Municipal Court building.

### **Support extends beyond court**

Councilmember Robin Arredondo-Savage, a U.S. Army veteran, has been working on the city's veterans initiatives as part of a working group with Councilmember Corey Woods and more than a dozen partners that include local veterans, Arizona State University, the Tempe Chamber of Commerce, Rio Salado Community College and the Arizona Department of Veterans Services. The group is committed to setting Tempe apart when it comes to supporting veterans, active military and their families.

The Veterans Court is just one way Tempe is working to meet veterans' needs. On Sept. 11, the Council held the first of two public hearings on the establishment of a Tempe Veterans Commission. The commission would join the city's other volunteer-appointed Boards and Commissions in advising the City Council on veterans issues. The second hearing and vote are Oct. 2.

In addition, the group of partners is working to drum up interest among developers in building affordable housing for veterans. And, in 2013, the city established a dedicated webpage ([www.tempe.gov/military](http://www.tempe.gov/military)) and listserv to provide information and resources for veterans and their families.

Arredondo-Savage said the efforts are about helping those who have helped their country.

"It's a great way to honor the veterans in our community and help them transition to civilian life," she said. "It's really important that they have access to the resources and tools they've earned."

###

*[Return to full list >>](#)*

---