



Tempe Veterans' Court celebrates first anniversary

Court and graduates exemplify the transformative power of military camaraderie

Tempe, Ariz. - When the graduates of Tempe's Veterans' Court celebrate its first-year anniversary Oct. 1 they join the march of success that began in 2008 in Buffalo, New York where the concept of a Veterans' Court was initiated.

The problem-solving court uses a non-traditional approach to resolve cases involving U.S. military veterans who have been charged with misdemeanor violations filed in Tempe Municipal Court. Many of the court participants have served in military conflicts and subsequently experience hardships such as medical conditions, unemployment, lack of education, and homelessness. The court partners with resources and organizations available to veterans to address those life situations.

The Tempe Municipal Court has a history of embracing the treatment court methodology of resolving cases with target populations such as the homeless and the seriously mentally ill. "Veterans' Court was initiated to extend the treatment option to veterans to address their unique needs that often times are a result of their service in the military," said Tempe Municipal Court Presiding Judge MaryAnne Majestic.

A team approach is used to review each participant's progress and compliance. The team includes a judge, court staff, a city prosecutor, a city public defender, Human Services department staff, a Veterans' Justice Outreach coordinator, and a Mercy Maricopa Integrated Care representative.

As Judge Pro Tem presiding over Veterans' Court, R. Gregg Maxon sees a positive outcome for the participants. "Veterans tend to be very proud of their service. We tap into that pride, and the discipline learned in military service, to tackle the challenges each veteran faces. When these attributes are coupled with the exceptional treatment services and benefits available to our nation's veterans, we see an extremely high success rate in our program," he said.

The program expects a rigorous adherence to the rules of participation; those who do not comply may be discharged. By completing the program, graduates may earn a dismissal or possibly a reduction in charges or in sentencing.

As a military veteran, Tempe Councilmember Robin Arredondo-Savage is proud of the veterans who have completed the program. "We've had 49 veterans successfully graduate from the court in its first year," she said. "Tempe is a Veteran-Supportive City and we show our commitment by helping veterans in need get back on their feet."

The Veterans' Court docket is held twice a month.