

New veteran's treatment court seeks "battle buddy" mentors

It's well known that military service can severely impact the lives of our veterans and their families as they return home from combat deployment. Many of them return with serious issues like alcohol and substance abuse, mental illness, homelessness, unemployment and strained family relationships. Oftentimes these issues go unaddressed, and veterans may end up in the criminal justice system. As the number of veterans in our criminal justice system continues to rise, so does the need for innovative solutions to help them address the serious issues they face.

Last month, the Solano County Veteran's Office, in collaboration with the Veteran's Administration, Solano Court system, District Attorney and Public Defender's Office initiated a Veteran's Treatment Court in our county, the seventeenth one in the state.

The mission of the new Veterans Treatment Court is to help veterans struggling with substance abuse, mental illness, homelessness and employment issues by providing them with a mentor, also known as a "battle buddy," helping them get their lives back into balance through a rigorous 18-month road to recovery.

According to the Veterans Administration, the recidivism rate for most offenders in our criminal justice system is between 50 and 60 percent. The recidivism rate for participants in Veteran Treatment Courts is 8 percent. Given these results, the new Veterans Treatment Court will not only change the lives of our veterans and their families, but will save our court system money by helping break the cycle of recidivism.

With more than 40,000 veterans in Solano County, the new treatment center is expected to be a significant asset to veterans in our community. With five battle buddies already on board, we are looking for a few more good men and women who want to help veterans in Solano County get back on their feet. The time commitment is minimal and may include a weekly phone call or the occasional lunch date.

Honorably discharged veterans who are interested in volunteering their time as battle buddies are encouraged to call my office at (707) 784-6590 and ask for Michael Mendoza, our mentor coordinator. You can also stop by during regular business hours to discuss how you can get involved in changing a veteran's life for good, forever.

Ted Puntillo is Director of Veteran's Services for Solano County. Reach him at (707) 784-6590 or tepuntillo@SolanoCounty.com. The Solano County Veteran's Services Office, 675 Texas St. in Fairfield, is open from 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday.