

MEDIA RELEASE



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 17, 2023

VETERANS COURT CELEBRATES 50TH GRADUATE

Kennewick, WA – The Benton County Veterans Therapeutic Court (VTC) is proud to announce the upcoming graduation of its 49th and 50th Veterans! This is a big milestone for Veterans Court – 50 lives with restored hope, 50 lives with restored pride, 50 lives forever changed. The graduation will be held on May 2nd at 10:00am in Courtroom 5 at the Benton County Justice Center.

The Benton County Veterans Therapeutic Court began in 2019 with just six participants. Even though the program held its first graduation less than three years ago, the impact is resonating throughout the community. Judge Dan Kathren stated “I’m incredibly proud of the Veterans Court team. Through their support, 50 Veterans have faced their demons and come out powerfully on the other side to resume their life of service to the country they love. It wasn’t easy, but these men and women are showing immense strength and courage and I am honored to be there to witness it.” Judge Kathren was one of the original committee members who helped Veterans Court become a reality and has been the Presiding Judge since it’s inception.

The VTC team is knowledgeable and seasoned, with 20 years of behavioral health experience and 56 years of legal experience. The VTC team also works closely with the Columbia Basin Veterans Center and the Department of Veterans Affairs, which contributes greatly to the program’s ongoing success. The team consists of the Judge, Behavioral Health Specialist/Active Probation Officer, Defense Attorney, Prosecuting Attorney, Court Coordinator, Law Enforcement Liaison from Benton County Sheriff’s Office, VA Liaison, and Mentor Coordinator.

The Benton County Veterans Therapeutic Court is funded in its entirety by the Benton County Public Safety Sales Tax. The PSST also fully funds the Benton County Mental Health Court, as well as the new Recovery Court.

About Veterans Court

The Benton County Veterans Therapeutic Court is a voluntary program created to recognize the selfless service of Veterans to our country by addressing their unique needs, emphasizing rehabilitation over incarceration, and diverting them from the traditional criminal justice system. VTC provides judicial accountability, intense supervision, structure, mentorship, and access to resources.

Program participants are required to participate in mental health counseling, substance abuse treatment (if applicable), submit to regular drug testing, perform community service, attend regular court appearances, and are monitored closely for program compliance.

The most unique benefit of VTC is the Mentor Program run by the Columbia Basin Veterans Center where veterans are assigned a veteran mentor to provide additional support to them while in the program. These relationships usually continue beyond graduation. Many of the VTC graduates return as Mentors themselves!

The goal of Therapeutic Courts is to break the cycle of the “revolving door” effect of the criminal justice system and support participants by promoting responsibility and accountability, and teaching participants to become productive law-abiding citizens, which in return reduces criminal recidivism and provides for better, healthier communities. Therapeutic Courts are the single most successful intervention in our nation’s history for leading people living with mental health and substance use disorders out of the justice system and into lives of sustained recovery and stability.

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