

News Advisory

From the Rhode Island Judiciary



District Court names director of veterans mentor program

March 23, 2012: District Court Chief Judge Jeanne E. LaFazia has appointed retired Army National Guard Col. William P. Babcock as the director of the new Volunteer Mentor Program for the court's Veterans Calendar. The establishment of the Mentor Program takes the Kent County pilot project to the next level with the addition of veteran mentors to assist present and former members of the military who enter the criminal justice system as a result of injuries related to their service in the armed forces. The mentors, all of whom will be volunteers, are veterans whose goal will be to support participants throughout the court process. They will assist the defendant and the court by serving as a coach, a guide, and a role model.

Babcock is a decorated 23-year veteran with command experience. He has agreed to take on the voluntary assignment which will include developing the program and training protocol for all participants. "Colonel Babcock is taking on this significant responsibility because of his passion and dedication to what we are trying to accomplish here in Rhode Island," Chief Judge LaFazia said, emphasizing that "he has the perspective of someone who has commanded troops; he has seen firsthand what our returning veterans are going through; he speaks their language and understands the unique challenges which they face as they attempt to re-enter our society."

Babcock retired from the Army National Guard in 2006. His last assignment was as commander and administrative officer of the 56th Troop Command in East Greenwich. He served two years of active duty that included a tour in Vietnam. He joined the National Guard in 1985. His overseas assignments included Afghanistan and Iraq.

Babcock said he has volunteered in other veteran organizations, many of them social. "But I really wanted to do something for the veterans themselves," he said. "This is that opportunity."

Chief Judge LaFazia introduced the Veterans Calendar to the District Court in 2011 in a program that drew the attention of U.S. Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse and U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder, who visited Rhode Island in June 2011 to learn more about it. In July 2011, Chief Judge LaFazia testified along with actor Martin Sheen before the Senate Judiciary Committee in Washington.

Observers of the Buffalo Veterans Treatment Court, a nationally recognized program, say the mentors are the key to its success. Mentors try to get participants to tap back into the pride they had in the military and move forward. The program's structure also strikes a positive chord with the veterans. Mentors are recruited from both genders and from all service branches, to provide the best pairing possible.

In Rhode Island, the Veterans Calendar is currently heard one afternoon a week at the Noel Judicial Complex in Warwick. District Court Associate Judge Pamela Woodcock Pfeiffer presides over the calendar. Judge Woodcock Pfeiffer commented that "with the majority of the individuals who have participated in the program and attended the required counseling sessions, you can actually see a distinct improvement both physically and emotionally from the person who first entered the arraignment court to the person who walks out of the courtroom door months later."

"After interacting in court for some months with the men and women who are participating in the program, it is clear to me how valuable a role Colonel Babcock and the mentors will play," Judge Woodcock Pfeiffer continued. "By helping guide the participants through the process, by encouraging them to connect with existing support services, and most importantly, by their insight into the experiences of the participants, the mentors will help them find and maintain a healthy stability and a sense of hope."

Chief Judge LaFazia continues to be excited by the progress of the Veterans Calendar in Rhode Island, and she believes that Colonel Babcock will bring great value to the program.

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