

## VETERANS CORNER

Tulare County has a Veterans' Court! Established in 2010, the court has provided veterans of Tulare County in the criminal justice system, suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), substance abuse, or psychological problems due to their service in a combat theater an intensive treatment program tailored to meet clinically identified needs.

A number of agencies and community partners, including the offices of the Tulare County District Attorney, Probation, Superior Court, Veterans' Services, as well as the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA), Veterans' Counseling Clinic, and local law enforcement agencies collaborated to create Veterans' Court.

Referrals to Veterans' Court come from a variety of sources, including arresting officers, defense attorneys, probation officers or the judiciary. To be eligible to enroll into the program, you must:

- Volunteer for participation,
- Reside in Tulare County,
- Be a U. S. Citizen or possess a Permanent Resident Alien Card,
- Provide evidence of documented combat service (valid DD-214 or equivalent),
- Not be currently on Active Duty in the U. S. Military,
- Sign a Waiver of Release for all medical and mental health records, and
- Not be charged with a Serious or Violent Felony

If you meet the above requirements, you will be further evaluated by the Tulare County Veterans' Court Board, which meets every month to determine suitability for successful completion of the program.

Once you've been accepted into the program, you must enter a guilty plea for the charged offense(s), and then you will be ordered to participate in and complete Veterans' Court. The program typically takes at least 18 months to complete, will require you to actively participate in periodic counseling sessions with a licensed psychologist, remain clean and sober, submit to drug testing, pay victim restitution as well as any fines and fees, and appear monthly in court. While in court, you will appear before the Veterans' Court judge, who monitors progress, offers encouragement, and imposes appropriate sanctions, as circumstances dictate.

When you successfully complete all five separate phases of the program, you have the opportunity to have the charges against you dismissed, and participate in a graduation ceremony. Your family and friends may attend your graduation to celebrate not only the accomplishment of completing the program, but also to mark the beginning of a new direction of your life.

*Ken Cruickshank, retired Navy Master Chief Petty Officer, is the Veterans Services Officer for Tulare County. Send your questions to the Veterans Service Office, 205 N. L St., in Tulare, by calling 684-4960 or emailing [kcruicks@tularehhsa.org](mailto:kcruicks@tularehhsa.org).*