



In his Second Inaugural Address in 1865, President Abraham Lincoln urged our nation “to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan....”¹ This has become the motto of the United States Veterans Administration,² as well as the theme of Justice for Vets, an advocacy group dedicated to the establishment of Veterans Treatment Courts throughout the nation.³

In September, Hillsborough Circuit Court Judge Michael

“Our Veterans Treatment Court is saving lives daily.”

— Julianne Holt, Public Defender

Scionti addressed a joint luncheon of the Senior Counsel Section and the Military & Veterans Affairs Committee. Judge Scionti, himself a decorated combat veteran who served in both Iraq and Afghanistan, described how the Veterans Treatment Court was begun in Hillsborough County in 2013 with Judge Richard Weiss, continued under Judge Gregory Holder, and has operated under his direction since 2017.

The Veterans Treatment Court is saving veterans. Its goals are to develop treatment plans to meet the individual needs of veterans, to rehabilitate veterans in order to foster their reintegration back into society, and to promote public

safety by lowering crime rates and reducing recidivism.⁴

Veterans appearing before the Veterans Treatment Court have violated the law and often have victimized others. But Judge Scionti explained that the court objectives are to identify mental health and substance abuse risk factors, implement therapeutic measures and incentives to encourage treatment, and develop problem-solving skills for long-term care and recovery.

The judge in the Veterans Treatment Court is part of a team which includes the State Attorney’s Office, the Office of the Public Defender,

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Senior Counsel Chairs Thomas Hyde and Donald Smith joined several attendees from MacDill Air Force Base and speaker Judge Michael Scionti at the luncheon in September.

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the Veterans Administration Justice Outreach Officers and veteran mentors. Several veteran mentors from MacDill Air Force Base were present at the luncheon. They volunteer to help save other veterans. Bay Area Legal Services and other local organizations also contribute to the success of this program to save veterans.

Hillsborough County Public Defender Julianne Holt summed it up well: “Our Veterans Treatment Court is saving lives daily. The unique partnership of the court team members creates a holistic approach which addresses the needs and challenges of veterans who find themselves in this

problem-solving court. Our goal is to ensure our veterans know they are not alone and that we will always be there for them.”

Hillsborough Circuit Court Judge Gregory Holder added, “The Veterans Treatment Court is a hybrid court, blending the aspects of the traditional drug, criminal, mental health and diversionary court processes. Our focus is on the identification, treatment, and successful reintegration of every enrolled veteran back into society. Partnering with the Veterans Administration, we break the cycle of hopelessness and non-recovery, and ultimately save our warriors from serious injury or death.”

The Senior Counsel Section and the Military & Veterans Affairs

Committee were honored to hear Judge Scionti’s moving presentation and to learn more about the Veterans Court and how it is saving our veterans. ■

¹ <https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/lincoln2nd.html> (visited Sept. 24, 2019).

² <https://www.va.gov/opa/publications/celebrate/vamoto.pdf> (visited September 24, 2019).

³ For more information about Justice for Vets, visit <https://justiceforvets.org/>.

⁴ <http://www.fljud13.org/CourtPrograms/DrugCourtPrograms/VeteransTreatmentCourt/AboutUs.aspx> (visited Sept. 24, 2019).

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