



## Second Judicial Circuit of Florida

Wednesday, September 16, 2020

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Brenda Mueller @ office 850.606.4450  
e-mail [muellerb@leoncountyfl.gov](mailto:muellerb@leoncountyfl.gov)

Paula Watkins @ office 850.606.4422  
e-mail [watkinsp@leoncountyfl.gov](mailto:watkinsp@leoncountyfl.gov)

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**WHAT: Sixteenth Leon County Veterans Treatment Court Graduation**

**WHEN: Monday, September 21, 2020 at 3:30 PM**

**WHERE: Zoom Video (Contact Paula Watkins for Zoom Call Information)**

**WHO: Nine (9) local veterans are scheduled to graduate after successfully completing this intensive four phase program**

Most veterans are strengthened by their military service, but for many their experience has resulted in suffering from "invisible wounds" such as post-traumatic stress disorder, major depression, suicide ideation, and traumatic brain injury. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, one in five veterans has symptoms of a mental health disorder or cognitive impairment and one in six veterans who served in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom suffer from a substance abuse issue. Research continues to draw a link between substance abuse and combat-related mental illness. Left untreated, mental health disorders common among veterans may directly lead to involvement in the criminal justice system. This involvement costs the criminal justice system, the community, the taxpayer, and the veterans themselves.

There was a recognized need to bring criminal justice involved veteran defendants with service connected behavioral health issues into a specialized treatment program without compromising the safety of the public. The Leon County Veterans Treatment Court and its many partners have met that need. The Leon County Veterans Treatment Court, under the direction of Leon County Administrative Judge Augustus D. Aikens, Jr. (a retired Colonel in the U.S. Army and Florida National Guard), uses Department of Veteran Affairs and volunteer veteran mentor resources to change Veteran's lives for the better.

We are excited to announce the Leon County Veterans Treatment Court has successfully graduated over 100 veterans. We are extremely proud of all the graduates. They worked hard, and we look forward to recognizing the nine veterans at the graduation ceremony on September 21<sup>st</sup> at 3:30pm.