

**RALPH N. KLEPS AWARDS
2010 – 2011**

**SUPERIOR COURT OF ORANGE COUNTY
Combat Veterans Court**

SPEAKER: Hon. Wendy Lindley, Judge – Superior Court of Orange County

We began seeing a lot of veterans coming through the criminal justice system for a variety of reasons. And in my mental health court I actually had a few veterans that we were treating. And one of those veterans ended up overdosing and dying. And we felt that was probably as a result of untreated PTSD. So, after that occurred I became determined to see if we could set up a special court where we would deal with issues surrounding combat. So it would be specifically for combat veterans, whether they were from the Vietnam War, or more recent wars, who are suffering from PTSD, traumatic brain injuries, substance abuse, or other psychological issues or sexual trauma as a result of their service.

SPEAKER: Andrea Serafin, VA Justice Outreach – Orange County

I think part of it was the fact that certain things weren't done after Vietnam. And a lot of the guys and gals started coming back from combat getting themselves into trouble, realizing that they weren't getting the care and treatment that they needed. And it was recognized that something needed to be done.

SPEAKER: Cyr Oca, Probation Department – Orange County

Most of these veterans are high functioning. Except that, again, the biggest problem they have would be reintegrating themselves back into society. They are having some issues regarding PTSD, some with TBI, and some with major depression.

SPEAKER: Hon. Wendy Lindley, Judge – Superior Court of Orange County

We get referrals from a multitude of sources. Sometimes it's from the VA outreach worker, who works with the jails and actually goes inside the jails and tries to connect veterans with services. And sometimes it's from a probation officer. Sometimes it's from the public defender's or defense lawyers. Sometimes even judges that make the suggestion to the lawyers that maybe Veterans Court would be a good alternative for the individual.

SPEAKER: Andrea Serafin, VA Justice Outreach – Orange County

We see strictly combat veterans. And they're a unique group because combat veterans, unlike other veterans (I mean other veterans are also very special), but combat veterans, they've seen a lot, they're dealing with a lot more things. Those that are in our program are dealing with TBI, PTSD. Many are dealing with substance abuse. They just have so many treatment needs that to put in a regular court, all of those needs aren't going to be addressed for them. Having them here, there is a certain camaraderie that they feel. Our whole team understands what they're dealing with, and we're able to link them to the services that they need at the VA.

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The most important thing is to get all the players to the table. So you definitely want to have the public defender's office; you want to have the district attorney's office, probation, your health care providers. But the most important player in the Veteran's Court is the Veteran's Administration.

SPEAKER: Cyr Oca, Probation Department – Orange County

So, Veteran's Administration coordinator, justice outreach coordinator, she monitors their treatment program that they are required to follow when they are placed in this program.

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I would highly recommend for anyone wanting to start a Veteran's Court, that they work with the VA and attempt to get a Veteran's Specialist Outreach worker for their Veteran's Court because it is amazingly helpful

SPEAKER: Andrea Serafin, VA Justice Outreach – Orange County

We've had 53 participants run through the program. We've had seven graduates. Our first big graduation was in October; we had five graduate then, and we've had two additional since. And we will slowly continue to have more as the months go by. Graduation is a really big thing. It's a time for them to just kind of soak in all the hard work that they've done. I mean, it is not easy doing this program. For most of them it's a minimum of eighteen months. So that's the day that they bring their family. They're here to celebrate the fact that they've done it. They've really did everything they've needed to do to get their life back together, to be a productive member of society, to give back.

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I believe that it is our really moral and ethical obligation as a society to step up to the plate and help these human beings who are suffering so.