



## News Release

FROM: Chambers of the Chief Judge  
19th Judicial Circuit  
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Waukegan, Illinois

### **VTAC Mentoring Program Earns National Achievement Award**

Chief Judge John Phillips is pleased to announce that the Veteran's Treatment and Assistance Court (VTAC) Mentoring Program of the Nineteenth Judicial Circuit has been recognized recently with an Achievement Award from the National Association of Counties (NACo). The awards are presented to honor innovative and effective county government programs that enhance services for its county residents.

NACo President Riki Hokama, council member, Maui County, Hawaii, said, "The National Association of Counties applauds county governments that are embracing innovative and more effective ways to serve their constituents. The Achievement Awards recognize counties' outstanding efforts to strengthen services and deliver results for residents across the country."

The Mentoring Program was established shortly after the launching of Lake County's Veterans Treatment and Assistance Court (VTAC) in 2011. The purpose of the program is to provide veteran offenders with encouragement from peer support and assistance so they remain in compliance with court ordered rehabilitative treatment and other court conditions with the end result of successfully completing the program. The program can take 12 to 30 months, depending on the individual case.

Mentors consist of volunteers from a number of sources including active and prior military personnel, law enforcement, volunteers from the Lake County Adult Probation Volunteer

Program, and community veterans' programs such as the Wounded Warrior Project, VFW, and the American Legion. Currently there are seventeen active peer mentors who have all served in the military in every branch of the Armed Forces.

"The success of the Mentoring Program has gone above and beyond the Court's expectations," said Judge Phillips. "We are very grateful and thank everyone involved with the Mentoring Program for their continued commitment and dedication in making the program work and for the success it continues to be today." Judge Phillips, a veteran himself, was instrumental in the creation of Lake County's Veterans Treatment Assistance Court (VTAC).

One of the most significant events of the VTAC program for the veterans is a formal graduation ceremony held in the Circuit's ceremonial courtroom. This means that the veterans have successfully completed all the requirements of the program. In addition to family members, other attendees include County Board members, judges, law enforcement, representatives from community agencies, community government officials, court personnel and VTAC Program members. The courtroom is always filled with well-wishers. The assigned peer mentors are present and play an important role in the graduation. They perform the Color Guard ceremony and also have the opportunity to make presentations to the audience about the veterans they've assisted and their successes accomplished in the program. Each mentor presents his or her veteran with a special challenge coin that was created for the VTAC Program. Thereafter, the veterans themselves step up to the microphone and thank everyone who has stood by them through their long and structured journey – they have achieved their goal.

Started in 1970, NACo's annual Achievement Award Program is designed to recognize innovative county government programs. Each nominee is judged on its own merits and not against other applications received.

NACo's Achievement Awards will be presented at its annual conference and exposition in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, July 10-13, 2015.

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