

Legal Notes: May 2014

La Crosse has been a leader in what are known as “specialty courts.” These courts are dedicated to particular areas, such handling drug offenses and OWI matters and emphasize treatment as a means of preventing recidivism. Another important court is the Veterans Court. The Veteran’s Court became active in November 2010.

The Veterans Court is part of a larger effort to address the problems returning veterans have reintegrating themselves into civilian life. Society has increasingly realized that many of the criminal difficulties that veterans experience throughout their lives may be rooted in their military service. The Veterans Court seeks to channel offenders into an arena where their service-related behavioral health issues can be recognized and appropriately addressed.

Veterans (or current members of the military) that are charged with criminal offenses, or otherwise come into contact with agencies, such as law enforcement, are reviewed to determine whether they meet the criteria for admission into the Veterans Court program. Certain offenses, such as those of sexual predators and some violent offenders, may not qualify. Once in the program, the various members of the program, including the judge, attorneys and a mentor, use a non-adversarial approach to providing appropriate services and monitoring of the veteran, with the goal of recovery and law abiding behavior.

Hand in hand with the Veterans Court is the La Crosse Area Veterans Mentor Program. The Veterans Court uses mentors to aid the veteran through the court process. The Mentor Program recruits and trains these mentors to be coaches, guides, role models and advocates for their fellow veterans not only in the Veterans Court but also in other aspects of their lives.

The Mentor Program is looking for qualified mentors. A mentor must be a military veteran and be willing to undergo training and adhere to the program. A mentor would learn about Veteran’s Affairs, behavioral health, the court system and other areas that impact the lives of veterans in need as well as about the program’s expectations. The trained mentors would have a LAVMP coordinator as they mentor veterans. Once training is completed, the program seeks to match mentor and veterans with similar demographics, such as the same service, time of service, age, and gender. If you wish to learn more about becoming a mentor, contact Thom Downer, the Executive Director of

the La Crosse Area Veterans Mentor Program at (608) 785-6420 or visit www.lavmp.org for more information.