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Hidalgo County Commissioners' Court

Ramon Garcia
County Judge

A. C. Cuellar, Jr.
Commissioner, Precinct 1

Hector "Tito" Palacios
Commissioner, Precinct 2

Joe M. Flores
Commissioner, Precinct 3

Joseph Palacios
Commissioner, Precinct 4

OFFICE OF HIDALGO COUNTY JUDGE RAMON GARCIA

Public Affairs Division

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430th DISTRICT COURT HOSTS VETERANS TREATMENT COURT GRADUATION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
THURSDAY, MAY 29, 2014

EDINBURG - Four honorably discharged veterans and three family members of veterans successfully completed the Veterans Treatment Court Program and were awarded coins and certificates of completion on Wednesday, May 28, 2014.

Hidalgo County's Veterans Treatment Court Program is the only one in Texas that allows the families of veterans into the program; recognizing that the issues faced by many veterans – especially those returning from combat duty – trickle down to their spouses and children. But that's about to change.

"We presented our program at two conferences recently, one on May 14 in San Antonio for people involved with veterans in the justice system and to judges from the region at South Padre Island on May 23," said Judge Israel Ramon, Jr. "We talked about our program and the justification for opening it up to family members and I believe that other Veterans Courts in Texas will soon be accepting families too."

Ramon presides over the 430th District Court in Edinburg, where the Veterans Treatment Court Program is held each Wednesday. Ramon called described the program as a collaborative therapeutic court that partners with several county departments and businesses to divert veterans and their families from prison and to offer the services and support that they need to be productive, law-abiding citizens. Partners include the Hidalgo County Community Supervision & Corrections Department, Public Defender's Office, Hidalgo County Veteran Services, McAllen Veterans Center and Tropical Texas Behavioral Health.

Steve Harris, the Veterans Court Mentor Program Coordinator and retired U.S. Army Sergeant first class, received special recognition from both Tropical Texas Behavioral Health and the Veterans Treatment Court Program for his dedicated service and efforts.

Guest speaker Hilda Y. Szabo, an Air Force veteran, said that 2.5 million Americans have served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Of those, 20 percent of troops returning home have PTSD," Szabo said. "What are some of the symptoms of PTSD? Avoidance is one and addiction is



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an avoidance behavior. Another symptom is the inability to stay focused – you can't concentrate. So you can't keep a job. That's another symptom."

She said Veterans Courts are equipped to handle the special needs and circumstances of veterans.

"So don't think you are alone and that no one cares," Szabo said. "We care. That's why all these people are here."

Each program graduate said a few words, thanking the court panel for their continued support.

"I'm thankful for not just a chance, but a second chance to prove that I can change," said Rene Escatiola, who served in the Navy from 2004-2006.

Roxana Casanova, one of three family member participants, was not able to hold back her tears, but assured the audience that her tears were of joy as well as sadness.

"I want to thank everyone, but especially my dad. Because of him, I was able to get in this program," said Casanova.

The other's receiving their certificates Wednesday were: Baudelio Cortinas, U.S. Army 1966-1968; Eduardo Galvan, U.S. Army 2002-2006; Danny Barron and Britnee Lee.

Wednesday marked the seventh program completion ceremony for the Veterans Treatment Court Program since its inception in 2011. As has become tradition, lunch and cake was served to the graduates, their guests and program staff. The court is a hybrid of a Drug Court, Mental Health Court and Sanctions Court. The mission of the program is to provide intensive treatment and supervision to veterans and family members of the United States Armed Forces in order to promote public safety and reduce recidivism.

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