



## Second Judicial Circuit of Florida

November 29, 2016

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

**WHEN: Monday, December 5, 2016 at 3:30 PM**

**WHERE: Leon County Courthouse, Courtroom 2-E**

**WHO: Eleven (11) 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 Judge Augustus 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.