



PAUL CUNNINGHAM

WARD 2

April 20, 2018

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PAUL'S NOTE

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In last week's newsletter, I mentioned a few of the "specialty courts" that the city has. At Tuesday's study session, we had a presentation by Judge Michael Pollard, who presides over one of those courts, veterans court.

Its full name is Regional Municipalities Veterans Treatment Court, as it also handles cases from Marana, South Tucson, Oro Valley and Sahuarita. The word "Treatment" in the name is a good indicator of its mission: to give veterans who enter the court system an alternative to incarceration.

We often talk about how the veterans that

returned from Vietnam didn't get the parades or accolades that those from previous conflicts did. They also didn't get a lot of the services that they needed to recover and adjust to society from the unique stresses of that war. Now, a new generation of veterans is returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with many of the same issues of reintegrating into civilian society. Veterans court is a service we offer when the men and women who served us run into problems with the law.

Despite what you may have heard nationally, our local VA hospital is the best in

the country. Still, they can only help the veterans that come to them for help. Often, the first sign that a veteran is having problems is when they break the law. A program like veterans court allows the VA another opportunity to reach out and help our vets, particularly in these cases before law breaking becomes a lifestyle.

The VA isn't the only community partner. Old Pueblo Community Services, Rally Point and La Frontera all help provide services. The U of A's law school provides defense counsel through its veterans law clinic.

PAUL'S NOTE (CONTINUED)

To be eligible for veterans court, one must simply be a veteran of the armed forces. That's regardless of whether an individual served in combat or what the nature of his or her discharge was. Also, the offense cannot be a felony, and persons with previous felony convictions are not eligible.

Veterans who are eligible are put on a treatment plan and are due for monthly appearances at veterans court. If they complete the treatment program and do not re-offend, the charges are dropped (they are also issued a challenge coin). Re-offending will get them sent back to regular court.

Since 2012, 435 veterans have graduated from the program. 86% of enrollees in the program graduate successfully.

What makes the program work, according to Judge Pollard, is that throughout this process, vets are working with other vets. The mentorship and peer support provided by Rally Point is all given by veterans, and many of the law students that work as defenders are veterans as well. Pollard himself is a Marine Corps veteran.

The program is working. At intake, 25% of vets in the program indicated alcohol use in the previous 30 days. Six months later, that number was down to 14%. 11% reported use of illegal drugs at intake, that was down to 6% six months later. Also, vets that went through the program reported more stable home and work environments six months after they entered the program.

Recidivism rates from the program are 17%, markedly lower than 38% that we have in our state. That lower recidivism results in an estimated savings of \$3.8 million in court and incarceration costs.

We heard from Guillermo Andrade, who went through veterans court after a brush with the law. Before he was in veterans court, he says he was a "hot mess" and in a "real jam." He had a pregnant wife and a one year old child. He needed to get his life together.

Because of veterans court, he had a VA social worker that guided him through the months of required counselling for his offense, support he would likely have not had in regular court. "The structure and accountability got me through," he said. He currently is employed at La Frontera.

Two big issues are coming up for veterans court, but I'm confident we can deal with both of them.

PAUL'S NOTE, CONTINUED

One is that the program was funded under a grant from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. That funding is due to run out later this year. It will cost \$350,000 from our general fund to continue the program. Frankly, that's a bargain. My colleagues and I made it clear to the city manager that we want continued funding in the budget.

Second is how this fits into ongoing discussions of court consolidation with the county. Currently, Pima County Justice Court has a veterans court program, but it doesn't offer the same support services and is limited to vets that are eligible for VA services. I have made it clear both here and at the table that any consolidation plan with the county must have provisions for continuing veterans court as well as other specialty court programs. I reiterated this again at the meeting on Tuesday afternoon.

I'm committed to continuing this program for all of our neighbors, like Guillermo, that were willing to serve in our country's uniform. It is the least we can do.

PALO VERDE PARK SHRED EVENT

Norma Coffman (Fernandez Realty), Drew Dodds (US Lending Team) and Stewart Title are sponsoring a Shred-A-Thon at Palo Verde Park (355 S Mann Ave) on April 21, 9—11am. Beacon Secure's truck will be at the pool to safely dispose of your documents and paperwork.

In addition to paper, you will be able to safely dispose of electronic devices such as computer monitors, CPU/Tower units, laptops, stereos, et cetera.

PARENTS NIGHT OUT AT UDALL PARK

Enjoy three hours of childless free time on Friday, April 27, 4:30-7:45 p.m., while your kids have organized activities with Tucson Parks and Recreation. The event will be held at Udall Recreation Center, 7200 E. Tanque Verde Road. The cost per child (ages 5-11 only) is \$4. The Lorax theme features a showing of the movie *The Lorax*, supervised games, and crafts. Pizza, popcorn, and drinks will be served during the movie and are included in the fee. You must register at Udall Recreation Center by Wednesday, April 25. Please call (520) 791-4931 for registration details. Space is limited.

PARKS PROGRAMS

Activity Guide: Tucson Parks and Recreation's Activity Guide for spring 2018 has arrived, and copies are available for pick up at all Parks and Recreation facilities. It can be viewed online at: www.tucsonaz.gov/parks.

The Activity Guide contains complete information on leisure classes, KIDCO after-school, aquatics, sports programs, registration, and the Discount Program. Registration dates are as follows:

All leisure class listings are online at www.EZEEreg.com. Please see the Activity Guide for more information on registration and deadlines. Whether you enjoy being active in slow-pitch softball leagues, want to design amazing jewelry, or get healthy and fit, there truly is something for everyone at Tucson Parks and Recreation. For questions or more information on registration or programs, contact Registration Services at 791-4877.

Parents Night Out: Enjoy three hours of childless free time on Friday, April 27, 4:30-7:45 p.m., while your kids have organized activities with Tucson Parks and Recreation. The event will be held at Udall Recreation Center, 7200 E. Tanque Verde Road. The cost per child (ages 5-11 only) is \$4. The Lorax theme features a showing of the movie *The Lorax*, supervised games, and crafts. Pizza, popcorn, and drinks will be served during the movie and are included in the fee. You must register at Udall Recreation Center by Wednesday, April 25. Please call (520) 791-4931 for registration details. Space is limited.

Carol West Senior Addition: The Carol West Senior Addition at Udall features multipurpose rooms, lounge area with TV, computer adult learning center and pool tables. It is located at Udall Park and is open from 9 am to 4 pm Monday thru Friday.

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Remember to like
Paul on Facebook!

Please bring these items to the Ward 2 Office
for the following charities:

**THE COMMUNITY FOOD BANK—Non Perishable
Items**

**DIAPER BANK OF SOUTHERN ARIZONA—
Infant/Child/Adult Diapers**

**TIHAN - Personal Care Items for Individuals
and Families in Need**

LIONS CLUB—Eye Glasses

**DANCING IN THE STREETS ARIZONA—Ballet/
Dance Equipment**

CASA MARIA—Plastic bags

**SR. JOSE WOMEN'S SHELTER—Summer items
and clothing, athletic shoes, back packs, tote**

MAYOR AND COUNCIL

The next Mayor and Council meeting will be on **Tuesday, May 8**. Regular Session starts at 5:30 pm following an afternoon study session. There is always a short call to the audience before the business portion of the meeting. Council chambers are located downtown at 255 W Alameda.

The agendas for the meetings are posted online at <http://cms3.tucsonaz.gov/clerks/mcdocs>

