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## Veterans Assistance Project available in Ocean County

A program to assist military veterans who enter the court system has started in Ocean County.

The Veterans Assistance Project is a combined effort of the judiciary, the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, and the New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Mental Health Services, to provide referrals to existing community services as well as mentors for veterans.

"Because veterans and their families have sacrificed much in defending our country, we should provide them with the services and support they need so that they can resume their lives in society," New Jersey Supreme Court Chief Justice Stuart Rabner said.

"The courts and other agencies are committed to addressing the special concerns of veterans who come in contact with the court system so they can get their lives back on track," he added.

According to a press release, the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs will determine which veterans are assigned mentors. The mentors, active and retired veterans themselves, volunteer to work with defendants while their criminal cases are pending and afterward.

They see that veterans receive assistance and try to help them avoid behaviors that may lead them back into the criminal justice system.

"Ocean County has one of the largest veterans communities in the state," said Maj. Gen. Glenn K. Rieth, the adjutant general of New Jersey who oversees the state Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and serves as commander of the New Jersey National Guard. "The expansion of this program into Ocean County is a critical step to fulfilling our commitment to bring this vital service to every veteran in need in New Jersey."

In Ocean County, the civil, criminal, family, finance, general operations, municipal and probation divisions and the Office of the Ombudsman are participating in the program.

According to the press release, some veterans return from military service with physical, mental or personal issues and may turn to drugs or alcohol in an attempt to manage the stress of returning to civilian life.

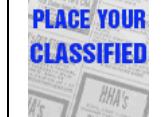
The Veterans Assistance Project aims to connect service members who need help with existing programs and mentors to address those issues.

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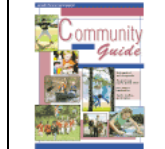
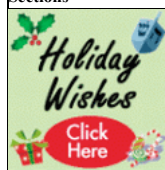
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The Veterans Assistance Project was piloted in Atlantic County in the municipal courts and in the criminal division of Superior Court in December 2008.

It also is in operation in Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Bergen, Burlington, Essex, Gloucester, Mercer, Monmouth, Morris, Passaic, Salem, Sussex and Union counties.

More than 400 referrals have been made in those counties since the program began.

The program is geared toward providing services to veterans, not diverting veterans from the courts. Veterans who are charged with indictable and non-indictable

offenses, other than minor traffic matters, as well as veterans who are on probation, are eligible to participate in the program.

A video about the Veterans Assistance Project can be found at [youtube.com/njcourts](http://youtube.com/njcourts).

