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FROM: Chambers of the Chief Judge
19th Judicial Circuit
Lake County
Waukegan, Illinois 60085-4359

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Waukegan, Illinois

THE NINETEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT CELEBRATES FOUR VETERANS' TREATMENT AND ASSISTANCE COURT GRADUATES

Chief Judge Mark L. Levitt greeted attendees, both in-person and virtually, as the families of the graduates and the Veterans Treatment and Assistance Court (VTAC) team gathered to celebrate Kyle, Juan, Donald, and Robert for their successful completion of Veterans Court. He stated, "It is my great privilege and honor to be here today. Of all our problem-solving courts, VTAC holds a special place in my heart because I was a part of this program from the very beginning. Judge John Phillips was the driving force behind our Specialty Courts and when I first became a judge, he tapped me on the shoulder to become a part of VTAC. Because I presided over this Court, I know how hard all the graduates worked to get here today. On behalf of the Nineteenth Judicial Circuit, I would like to extend my sincerest congratulations to Kyle, Juan, Donald, and Robert. I am proud of you, and I know your families are proud of you."

Lake County Sheriff's Office Court Security Officer Daniel August performed *The National Anthem*, while the graduates led the guests in the *Pledge of Allegiance*. [Quilts of Valor](#) volunteers presented the four graduates and Lake County Sheriff's Office Court Security Officer and 29 years United States Naval Veteran, five years active duty followed by 24 years as a Reservist, Michael Johnson with quilts; the Mission of the Quilts of Valor Foundation is to cover Service Members and Veterans touched by war with comforting and healing quilts.

Presiding Judge of the Nineteenth Judicial Circuit's Restorative Justice Division, Circuit Judge Christen L. Bishop explained the importance and impact of the VTAC Court. She stated, "VTAC was established back in 2011 when the Court, criminal justice officials, and the VA recognized a need in the community and in the justice system to assist our veterans with homelessness, addiction, and suicide attempts; and a way to connect them with the community. It is our mission for VTAC to enhance public safety by providing community supervision, assistance, and treatment services through a non-adversarial and collaborative effort. We strive to improve the quality of life of our justice-involved veterans who served under honorable conditions. With today's four graduates, I am happy to say we have now graduated over 100 veterans in the last 10 years."

Judge Bishop impressed upon and recognized the importance and impact of the VTAC team and justice partners who make this program possible: her former VTAC partner Circuit Judge Christopher R. Stride, her new Specialty Court partner Associate Judge Paul B. Novak, Chief Judge Mark L. Levitt, members of the Lake County Adult Probation Department, the Lake County State's Attorney's Office including Hitch the Therapeutic Intensive Monitoring (TIM) Court Labrador Retriever, the Lake County Public Defender's Office, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center, public officials, law enforcement officers, former program participants, volunteers, mentors, and treatment centers.

Judge Bishop concluded the ceremony by stating, "Kyle, Juan, Donald, and Robert, it is now my privilege, honor, and duty to announce that you are all hereby discharged from any further obligations

of this Court and your Veterans Court probation and supervision are terminated. Your cases are closed. Congratulations and best of luck to you."

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