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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**LEHIGH COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY TO ANNOUNCE  
COMMENCEMENT OF VETERANS' MENTOR PROGRAM**

Lehigh County District Attorney James B. Martin, in cooperation with various court and county-related offices, will announce the commencement of the Lehigh County Veterans' Mentor Program at a gathering of mentors and court and county employees at the Veterans Sanctuary in Allentown on Thursday, Oct. 6, 2011.

The media is invited to attend the event at the Veterans Sanctuary at 24 S. Fifth St., Allentown, from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. A tour of the Sanctuary will be given.

The county's mentor program, "Leave No Veteran Behind," which is modeled after similar initiatives in Pennsylvania and around the country, evolved from a January 2011 meeting that was attended by District Attorney James B. Martin; Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice Seamus P. McCaffery, who serves as the court's liaison for problem-solving courts in the state; Lehigh County President Judge Carol K. McGinley; Lehigh County Judge Kelly L. Banach, administrative judge of criminal court; and others involved in the criminal justice system and Veterans Administration systems at the state and local levels.

Martin said the program is not a diversion program or "get-out-of-jail free" card for veterans who have been charged with misdemeanor offenses or nonviolent felonies. One of the goals of the program is early identification of veterans in the court system and drug, alcohol and

mental health issues they have so they can be paired with veteran mentors in the community.

The mentors will help the defendants navigate the criminal justice, treatment and Veterans Administration systems. The program is voluntary for defendants who are veterans.

“The ultimate goals are to reach appropriate, fair resolutions in their cases, to help veterans receive the services they need and to help them adjust to civilian life so they can become productive members of society,” Martin said.

In February, the District Attorney’s Office notified the media and public that Lehigh County authorities were considering establishing a mentor program. Authorities first had to determine if veterans in the Lehigh Valley would be interested in volunteering. “The response was overwhelming,” Martin said. “We knew there was a need for this kind of program, but we didn’t know what the response would be from the veteran community. We learned that veterans wholeheartedly support it.”

In April, a Steering Committee was formed to plan the program. Members of the Committee are from the District Attorney’s Office, the Public Defender’s Office, the Adult Probation Office, Lehigh Valley Pretrial Services, the Lehigh Valley Veterans History Project Roundtable, Lehigh County Drug and Alcohol, the Lehigh County Veterans Affairs office and Lehigh County Prison.

The Committee has reviewed numerous applications and has conducted interviews of applicants. County detectives did background checks of applicants, who also were asked to supply copies of their DD 214 as proof of service.

“The candidates were extremely candid in their interviews and shared their own experiences, both good and bad, in civilian and military life,” said First Assistant District Attorney Steven Luksa. “They showed a sincere desire to help fellow veterans who made bad choices but can turn their lives around with the help of another veteran and a coordinated effort by officials in the criminal justice and VA systems.”

The Committee selected 15 mentors, including three women, who have diverse backgrounds and military and combat experiences. Some are still actively serving in the military.

A dozen mentors already have undergone a four-hour training course that was taught in August by Casey Garrett, program director of Family Answers, a Lehigh Valley social service agency. Garrett has directed Warmline, a telephone support line for people who live with mental illness, for the past six years.

Committee members recently toured the Veterans Sanctuary, which is hosting the Oct. 6 event, and compiled a Resource Book for mentors that has names, addresses and telephone numbers of veterans' organizations, clinics, hospitals and support services and other social service agencies in the Lehigh Valley, state and nation.

The committee has received several applications from veterans/defendants who want mentors. They will be paired with mentors in the near future.

Brochures on the program and applications for defendants will be available in all offices of magisterial district judges, the District Attorney's Office, the Central Booking Center in the prison, Court of Common Pleas offices, the Public Defender's Office and Pretrial Services office. They also will be made available to private defense lawyers and veterans' groups.

Applications to be a mentor can be obtained by emailing Debbie Garlicki in the District Attorney's Office at [debbiegarlicki@lehighcounty.org](mailto:debbiegarlicki@lehighcounty.org). Applications also are available on the District Attorney's Office link on the Lehigh County website, <http://www.lehighcounty.org>.

Allentown

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