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### **San Mateo Veteran's Court Finds New Leadership**

**REDWOOD CITY**— San Mateo Superior Court's award-winning Veteran's Treatment Court Program is undergoing a transition in leadership as long-serving Judge John Grandsaert retires and passes the gavel to Judge Michael K Wendler.

Grandsaert began his legal career in San Francisco in 1977, but started his work in San Mateo County as a Deputy District Attorney in 1987. In 2004, then-Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger appointed him as a San Mateo Superior Court Judge and he served in many different roles while on the Bench including a two-year term as Presiding Judge in 2015-2016.

He led the effort to institute Veterans Treatment Court in 2012, and has been its only judge for the past 10 years. Grandsaert said he takes great pride in his years presiding over the Veterans Treatment Court.

"Leading our Veteran's Treatment Court, seeing the transformation that took place in the lives of so many Veterans who appeared in that Court, was the most rewarding part of my judicial career," he said.

Veterans Courts use a treatment-oriented approach. National statistics show that veterans experience higher rates of homelessness, substance use disorder, and mental illness than non-veterans. Oftentimes these issues are a factor in criminal behavior.

In Veterans Court, the judge consults with a multi-agency team to connect each veteran to the services they need while under probation supervision. This includes referring veterans to care through the local Veterans Affairs hospital. Each veteran in the program is assigned a veteran mentor while the treatment team works to connect them to recovery services, stable housing, and employment.

The San Mateo Veteran's Treatment court received national recognition under Grandsaert's leadership. The United States Department of Justice awarded the program an enhancement grant in 2021. Grandsaert himself was awarded Veteran of the Year by the San Mateo Board of Supervisors in 2016. Supervisor Warren Slocum praised Judge Grandsaert for his service to the county's veterans.

"Judge Grandsaert has gone above and beyond to help our veterans who have gone off track, giving them a second chance and a path forward. He does this as a judge, a veteran and an amazing human being. It has been my honor to work with Judge Grandsaert – even more meaningful as a Vietnam veteran myself," Slocum said.

Wendler, who took over from Grandsaert in October was appointed to the Superior Court in 2020.

“Judge Grandsaert retires after a legendary career as a prosecutor and judge, dedicating his adult life to service to the residents of San Mateo County,” Wendler said. “By establishing Veterans’ Treatment Court, he made a positive impact on hundreds of veterans, ensuring they receive the treatment and resources they earned. As a veteran myself, I am humbled and honored for the assignment. I will continue to serve our veterans with compassion and justice.”

Wendler also serves as a colonel in the United States Marine Corps Reserves, and in his 24 years of service has deployed to combat in Afghanistan and Iraq. When he isn’t hearing cases in San Mateo County, he serves as the Deputy Commander/Senior Reservist of Combat Logistics Regiment 45, based near Atlanta, GA.

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