

JUDGE RAYMOND VOET

Judge Raymond P. Voet put two constraints on himself back when he was figuring out his career path: “I wanted to make an honest living, but more importantly, I wanted to make a difference doing something I like.”

Today, as presiding judge of the 64A District Court Veterans Treatment Court, he is doing both.

Judge Voet has always had a strong passion for history, dating back to his childhood days where he went to school in Ionia, the same city where he works today.

“I actually wanted to be a history teacher. Then my history teacher told me I should be a lawyer,” he said. Just a young teenager at the time, he would go on to follow his teacher’s advice.

“When I left Ionia for college, I didn’t have plans to come back to start my career here. But I happened to be back home studying for the bar exam and I walked into the prosecutor’s office to get a police report. The head secretary knew my dad, the former chief of police, and recognized me as ‘Little Ray.’”

She eventually convinced him to apply for assistant prosecutor, and he was later elected county prosecutor in 1992. “That woman who called me ‘Little Ray’ back in 1987, Cheryl Pinnow, is now my court administrator.”

“I was at first leery about being a prosecutor in the town I grew up in — no one’s a saint,



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including me,” he admits. “So I had to make a decision: can I live with being in a position of authority in a town where I had been a teenager and where I had done all of the stupid things teenagers do?”

He decided that he could, and he served as a prosecutor until 1999, when he was appointed to the bench.

“The instincts in the courts when I joined the bench were to solve problems of crime by punishing. That was the mentality of the 80s and 90s; we got tougher and tougher on crime and jails were overcrowding,” he explains.

Judge Voet’s passion for history led him full circle: helping struggling individuals and making a difference in his hometown.



During this time, Judge Voet determined there was a better way to handle cases involving offenders with underlying issues and that it was time to reevaluate Ionia’s courts. “That’s when we looked at the specialty court model.”

On the heels of Operation: Enduring Freedom in 2001 and Operation: Iraqi Freedom in 2003, Judge Voet began to see more and more veterans come into his court.

“One veteran in particular was just heart-breaking to me. He had a drunk driving charge, and I put him on probation,” he recalls. “I tried to get him some help, but he just could not stop himself from drinking. It turns out, he had a friend of his killed right beside him during their service; jail was not going to help.”

At this point, veterans treatment courts were starting to be formed around the country, and he looked at those court models, in particular.

“Deeply, at a personal level, I appreciate the sacrifices people who wear a uniform for this country make. I understand the true bravery and valor that goes into being a soldier for the freedoms that I enforce and protect in the courtroom,” he shares. “It was easy for me at that point to decide to start a veterans court, and I’m really glad I did.”

Judge Voet appreciates the opportunity to help individuals by targeting underlying issues, such as PTSD, in the many veterans he sees.

“Not only do we help that individual, we help society. We reduce the likelihood that they’re going to commit further crimes, and hurt more people, all the while reducing cost to taxpayers — incarceration, jails, etc.,” he reflects. “If I can turn somebody around, if I can help them deal with the core problems that cause their criminal behavior, it’s a double-win. That human being wins and society wins.”

Judge Voet is very involved in the Supreme Court’s Michigan Judicial Institute, as well as the Michigan District Judges Association, Criminal Justice Policy Commission, and State Court Drug Treatment Advisory Council.

He received his undergraduate degree from Aquinas College in Grand Rapids, and earned his law degree from the University of Detroit.

When he isn’t working, Judge Voet likes to hunt, fish, play guitar, and spend time with his wife of 27 years, a kindergarten teacher, and their four kids. 🎸



Judge Voet with a graduate.