

How One Vet Court Graduate Learned the Importance of Having Gratitude and the Right Attitude

For Kevin Hier, of Lansing, Father's Day was a turning point in his life.

He received his second OWI in the wee hours of the morning after just leaving the bar. After spending a night in jail, his lawyer informed Kevin about the veterans treatment court (VTC) at 54-B District Court in East Lansing, and Kevin instantly felt relieved. His case was transferred from Lansing and he started the program in September.

After serving in the Iraq War, life was rough for Kevin. He admits his head was not in the right place, which caused him to lose contact with his family for almost two years.

When he first began the VTC program, Kevin had no interest in being there, admitting that he couldn't stand the place, and felt awkward. But after three or four months in the program, things began to look up.

"Each month, I'd leave the program and I felt like my spirits were soaring, I was rising; I couldn't even believe how good I felt afterwards," Kevin reflected.

On graduation day Kevin felt as if he could "jump up and touch the stars."

"I feel like I finally became the person I should have been," he shared.

Working with Judge Richard Ball, who presides over the VTC, was something Kevin described as 'very supportive and even comical at times.' In light of his positive experience, Kevin enjoys going back to court, by choice.

"If I don't go back, then I don't have that push," Kevin explained. "I can go back and be supportive — I know how people are feeling; we all feel each other's pain and hopefully we can always be there for support."



Judge Richard Ball and VTC Graduate Kevin Hier

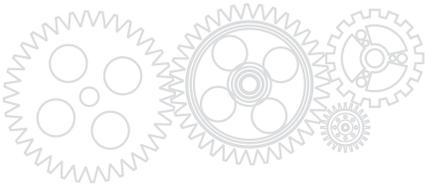
Kevin also says he sees legal officials in a whole new, positive light.

He also began talking with his family again, and is especially grateful for his aunt and his grandpa, explaining that life would have been a lot harder without them. Kevin has a good group of friends and spends a lot of time with his sister.

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— Kevin Hier





VETERANS TREATMENT COURT JUDGE

Richard Ball

“I can hang around with my family while they are drinking and not even feel a thing — no urge to do anything. It’s just great fun,” he shared.

Music has been his biggest coping mechanism. “If I’m listening to music, I’m happy,” Kevin said.

Right now, Kevin’s main goals are to stay sober, be drug-free, stay financially set, and eventually start a family. Kevin is happy with the progress he has made and feels that everything in his life is finally all straightened out.

“I have been so grateful to see the progress of most of the veterans who go through...During the course of our court proceedings, if I speak with a successful veteran, that, to me, is as good as it gets.”

— *Judge Ball*

Judge Richard Ball, of 54-B District Court in East Lansing, is something of a pioneer in Michigan’s judiciary.

When 54-B District Court started its veterans court program in 2010, it was only one of two veterans courts in Michigan. Judge Ball is the second judge to lead the program, and began doing so in 2014. The program has graduated upwards of 200 veterans.

“I have been so grateful to see the progress of most of the veterans who go through, but not all are successful,” said Judge Ball. “During the course of our court proceedings, if I speak with a successful veteran, that, to me, is as good as it gets.”

Judge Ball says that his own military experience in the Michigan National Guard has shaped his experience in the court. While he can’t fully relate to those veterans who saw combat and might be suffering from PTSD and/or addiction as a result, he is still able to offer a different perspective than most judges.

Kevin Hier is the program’s most recent graduate and success story.

When speaking about Kevin, whom Judge Ball bonded with thanks to a shared sense of humor, he remarks, “I hope that Kevin can gain a new perspective about the value of life and the value of good citizenship and the lack of value associated with breaking the law. [I hope] that he can also gain desire to assist other veterans when they find themselves in the same position that he was, and I think he has already expressed his desire to become a mentor.”



Judge Ball on the bench