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In Brief:

Suffolk County Opens Veterans Court

Court officials yesterday joined Congressman Steve Israel and Veterans Affairs officials to launch Suffolk County's Veterans Court. Modeled on other problem-solving courts, the Veterans Court will offer treatment under judicial supervision for veterans suffering from substance abuse and mental health problems, such as post-traumatic stress disorder. The program is open to nonviolent misdemeanor and felony offenders but individuals must volunteer to participate.

The court will coordinate cases with staff from the Northport Veterans Affairs Medical Center, which will provide an on-site "resource coordinator." Suffolk County Administrative Judge H. Patrick Leis III, who called the new court "important," noted that establishing it will not require hiring staff.

Suffolk's Veterans Court is the seventh such court in the state, according to Judge Judy Harris Kluger, chief of policy and planning for the Unified Court System, who also spoke at yesterday's opening. "The invisible wounds inflicted by war can have a devastating impact on our soldiers," she said. District Court Judge John J. Toomey, Jr., a Vietnam veteran, will be the new Central Islip-based court's presiding judge. Noting that he found it difficult to re-adjust to civilian life, Judge Toomey said yesterday that he brings "somewhat of an understanding" to veterans' issues. The judge was scheduled yesterday to hear the court's first case. Mr. Israel, D-Huntington, noted in his remarks that Buffalo's Veterans Court, the first in the state, has a zero-percent recidivism rate.

—*Andrew Keshner*