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7 graduate from Veterans Court

FRANK GRAY | The Journal Gazette

They had psychological problems. They had addiction problems. And they ended up in trouble and in court.

Monday morning, seven of these people, all veterans, graduated from Veterans Court, a three-year-old program designed to deal with veterans who ran into difficulties and trouble after leaving the military.

The court, working with the Veterans Administration and other courts, is meant to give the veterans the help they need in dealing with emotional and psychological issues and the problems they spawn and help them overcome them.

After 18 months of meeting the intense requirements of the program, they have finished and are ready for what officials call a fresh start.

"One percent," Judge Fran Gull told the graduates. "You are the 1 percent who wear the uniform, who signed on the dotted line, vowing to give your life. The work that you did in the military, some of it scarred you. Thank you for what you have done."

State Sen. Jim Banks, R-Columbis City, the keynote speaker at the ceremony, said he was looking for inspiration from the graduates.

"Each of you graduates paid a price," Banks said. "You offered up something for us. And we owe you," more than they are receiving.

The deck is stacked against veterans, Banks said. Unemployment among veterans is twice as high. In

1970, 70 percent of the people in Congress had served in the military. Today, only 17 percent have.

"I'd like to shake the hands of extraordinary individuals who overcame challenges in life," Banks said of the graduates.

One graduate acknowledged that that "there are some things in life that you can't do on your own. You learn to be more humble," and learn that reaching out for help isn't weakness.

Another graduate spoke of addictions and taking back his life and taking control of his own life.

The graduates ranged in age from 32 to 70. They are members of the third Veterans Court class. In all, 28 veterans have now gone through the program.

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