

Jail housing focused on helping veterans get back on track

Recently, the Gwinnett County (GA) Sheriff's Office celebrated the grand opening of The Barracks, a jail housing unit designated exclusively for inmates who are military veterans. Gwinnett is the first jail in metro-Atlanta to feature such a housing unit and only the second in the state, which is no surprise since Gwinnett County Sheriff Butch Conway has a longstanding history of supporting our nation's military veterans. Many of his staff members are veterans themselves and his staff seeks opportunities to recruit at military bases around the



country to afford career opportunities to soldiers leaving military service. Sheriff Conway says their efforts stem from a deep appreciation for the service these highly trained professionals provided our nation and a desire to provide them employment as they transition to civilian life.

Their appreciation for military service now extends to inmates who are military veterans. The sheriff's staff has developed a specialized program to provide these inmate veterans with unique services during their

successful transition back into the community. Participation in the program is voluntary.

The program is the brainchild of Chief Deputy Lou Solis, a retired U.S. Army Ranger who joined the sheriff's office in 2016. Chief Solis added the veterans program to the existing Gwinnett Reentry Intervention Program (GRIP), which Sheriff Conway implemented when he partnered with the United Way of Greater Atlanta in 2012 to address the issue of recidivism in his jail. GRIP provides community resources for inmates who are

"Our goal is to help reconnect these inmates to the time in their lives when they made better decisions, respected authority and obeyed the law. This program has the potential to greatly influence these inmates and help them lead more productive lives when they're released from custody,"

Sheriff Butch Conway

incarceration at the Gwinnett County Jail. The Barracks is a therapeutic, 70-bed unit focused on providing the type of support crucial to helping incarcerated veterans make a

leaving incarceration, but are likely to return to jail due to homelessness, substance abuse and/or mental health issues.

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The recidivism rate among former inmates who received GRIP services is approximately 30%, which is half of the jail's general population rate.

The ultimate goal of Chief Solis' effort is to increase public safety within the community to reduce the number of its residents being victimized. "Military service should be greatly appreciated by the country who benefits from it. While some veterans go on to make less honorable choices later in life, their contributions to our national security are no less valuable. We are

committed to helping these veterans get their lives back on track by creating a program to provide them with resources to increase the likelihood they won't return to jail once they're released. As a retired U.S. Army Ranger myself, I'm honored to help serve my fellow veterans."



The Barracks program provides classes to address trauma associated with military service, drug abuse and behavioral therapy. The Barracks will maintain a regimented schedule which includes daily room

inspections and military-style physical fitness training. Military veterans have previously demonstrated their ability to lead a life of discipline, respect authority and follow orders, which the sheriff's office believes will be instrumental to the program's success.



Gwinnett County also enjoys the added benefit of having veterans pre-trial diversion programs at the State and Superior Court levels to recognize the contributions of military service and provide special veteran accountability courts to eligible defendants to address the particular needs of military veterans facing criminal charges. The Barracks is the most recent addition to an ever expanding network of GRIP resources as Gwinnett County leads the way in the war against recidivism.

Submitted by Deputy Shannon Volkodav, Public Relations Officer, Gwinnett County Sheriff's Office