

Concert, car show raise money for veteran's court program



Vivian Johnson

Isaiah Allen, 4, shakes hands with "Uncle Sam" at Sunday's veteran's court benefit. The court offers a new chance to military veterans who have fallen afoul of the law.

By [Craig Brown](#)

As of Sunday, August 19, 2012



Vivian Johnson

Donald Pitsch and his twin brother Richard, in red, look at the classic cars at Sunday's concert to benefit the Clark County Veterans Court. The brothers served in the Korean War.

On the Web

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Eight hours of music. Two dozen classic cars. One united purpose: To help veterans who have fallen afoul of the law.

Hundreds gathered Sunday at Esther Short Park to enjoy themselves and also to raise money for the Clark County Veterans Court.

The event was just one of a half-dozen fundraisers scheduled this year to support the court. It is one of several of the county's therapeutic courts, where the emphasis is not just on punishment, but on putting people on a more successful path in life.

The local veterans court is part of the Clark County District Court. It currently serves a little more than 20 veterans, who are expected to meet regularly with the judge and the court staff to review their progress toward living a better life. Each defendant is assigned a mentor, a fellow veteran who can be reached when a person is struggling to make the right choice. Graduation from the program generally takes several months, but success can result in criminal charges being deferred or dismissed.

The court, one of a handful of veterans courts in the Pacific Northwest, "allow an opportunity for servicemen or women to be rehabilitated," explained Larry Smith, the president of the nonprofit fundraising group that supports the court. Smith, who also serves on the Vancouver City Council and is a retired career Army officer, said that those who participate in the court suffer from problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder, alcoholism or drug addiction after serving difficult tours in Iraq, Afghanistan or in the case of a few veterans, Vietnam. Participants must meet eligibility requirements; a violent felon, for example, cannot participate.

Nationally, on average every day another Iraq or Afghanistan veteran commits suicide, Smith noted, bringing a tragic end to a life once pledged to serve our country.

Talent, toys on display

But enough of the serious stuff. Sunday's fundraiser was about entertainment. Darwin Zimmerman, the founding presiding judge of the veterans court, put together 11 local acts ranging from Three Together featuring Grammy-winning artist Doug Smith to award-winning Elvis tribute artist Mark Stevenz. The music was free; patrons were asked for donations.

The same rule applied at the car show, which occupied the brick plaza near the clock tower and spilled over to the area near the gazebo. Entries ranged from a '30s hot rod to an authentic English double-decker bus.

Zimmerman said that everyone he asked agreed to exhibit their vehicles, and that all of the musical talent either performed free of charge or at a greatly reduced cost.

The charitable veterans court board hopes to raise about \$30,000 to \$35,000 to support court activities this year, Smith said, and so far is about two-thirds of the way toward its goal.

Another fundraiser will be planned to coincide with Veterans Week activities in November. The donated money is used for things like transportation and providing defendants with phones so they can call their mentors. The bulk of the court's costs are paid by a three-year, \$350,000 federal grant.

Sponsors for Sunday's event were Elite Care, Ryonet, Vancouver Sign Group, Ameriprise Foster & Associates, Waste Connections, The Al Angelo Co., US Digital, law firm Marsh, Higgins, Beaty & Hatch, Goldies BBQ, Cakes by Design, Kileauea Hawaiian Shave Ice and Jett Burger Cafe.