

# 14<sup>th</sup> Circuit Drug Court graduates recognized

June 21, 2004

Mississippi Supreme Court Chief Justice James W. Smith Jr. told Drug Court graduates in Magnolia on Monday that their lives are at a fork in the road, and he urged them to choose the right path.

Chief Justice Smith told the graduates from Lincoln, Pike and Walthall counties to consider the adversities that they face as "ruggedization," a term coined by a computer company that subjected its products to extremes of heat and cold to test performance. He told participants to keep working for their goals.

"You've got a choice. It's your will. Make the right choice. You have so far," he said.

He also gave them a challenge: "Don't disappoint your friends. Don't disappoint the judge. But more so, don't disappoint yourself."

Former Drug Court participant Perry Magee, 43, of Tylertown knows pride of accomplishment, and personal disappointment. Magee watched as his wife Sandra Magee, 40, received her graduation certificate after completing four years of the Drug Court program. Magee himself was thrown out of Drug Court because he continued to use crystal methamphetamine. He was released from the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman in March after serving a three-year sentence.

Magee in an impromptu message to the courtroom packed with Drug Court participants and their families said, "I made it to Phase 3 and I was hard-headed. I didn't listen. My wife just graduated. I just got out of the penitentiary. Do what you gotta do, one day at a time. Don't do it like I did it."

Twenty-one people from Lincoln, Pike and Walthall counties were recognized Monday for completing the 14<sup>th</sup> Circuit Drug Court program. They have spent between three and four years in Drug Court. Fifteen people moved into the fourth and final phase, which is a year of non-reporting probation. Twenty-eight others were recognized as they moved into the third phase. Those 28 must complete a year of monthly reporting and drug testing, plus another year of non-reporting probation.

Mary Ann Pigott of Tylertown beamed as her son Ray Pigott, 36, of Tylertown, moved up to Phase 3 of the Drug Court program. A charge of food stamp fraud landed him in Drug Court. Recalling his struggle with drug addiction, she told the crowd, "They had to get his attention. They have given us back our son."

Deborah McCalip, 43, of Memphis, said she was a downtrodden shell of a person when a drug possession charge landed her in Drug Court in Lincoln County. She was addicted to crack cocaine. McCalip on Monday moved up to the non-reporting probation stage, Phase 4.

"I know that without Drug Court, I nor my beautiful 3-year-old son would be here today," McCalip said through tears. "I love you. Thank you so much."

Circuit Judge Keith Starrett started the 14<sup>th</sup> Circuit Drug Court program in 1999. It is the oldest felony

drug court in the state. Adams County Judge John Hudson, who presides over a juvenile drug court, said of Starrett's efforts, "This is the cradle for drug courts in Mississippi."

Eleven drug courts now operate in Mississippi.

Chief Justice Smith said, "It speaks volumes that what started in Pike County has spread across the entire state. It's catching, and it's a good addiction."

Drug Court judges and staff from across the state during the graduation ceremony thanked Sen. Cindy Hyde-Smith of Brookhaven, who authored legislation which created a statewide drug court system in 2003 and established a uniform funding mechanism for drug courts this year. Judge Hudson said, "She has worked tirelessly in this effort over the years, and we appreciate what she has done."

Hyde-Smith said, "It wasn't done by one person. It was done by so many people." She told Drug Court participants, "When you keep fighting, you can make things happen. I encourage you to do the same thing."

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