

11th Circuit Drug Court gets \$450,000 DOJ grant

Sept. 8, 2004.

The 11th Circuit Drug Court will receive a \$450,000 U.S. Department of Justice grant.

The 11th Circuit includes Bolivar, Coahoma, Quitman and Tunica counties. The grant will enable the expansion of the Drug Court program to include Quitman and Tunica counties. Eleven participants from Bolivar and Coahoma counties are already enrolled in Drug Court. The program started a year ago.

The three-year grant, which is provided by the Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs, began Sept. 1 and runs through Aug. 31, 2007. Court officials received notice of the grant award today.

The 11th Circuit Drug Court has previously operated entirely with volunteers and no budget, said Court Administrator Becky Cochran. Participants meet once every two weeks with Circuit Judge Albert B. Smith III or Circuit Judge Larry O. Lewis. Volunteers do the drug testing and monitoring of participants.

The grant will allow the court to hire a coordinator and a case manager to supervise Drug Court participants.

Cochran said, "We will be able to expand our program. We will be able to have a case manager that will allow for closer monitoring of the participants. It will allow us to pay for some treatment costs, which will get the participants into treatment faster."

Cochran said participants will be required to repay the treatment costs, as well as pay court costs and fines before they are permitted to graduate from the Drug Court program.

Judge Smith said what makes drug courts work is their ability to break the cycle of drug addiction by changing people's habits and lifestyles.

"The drugs are just killing our young people," Judge Smith said. "We've got to change hearts and minds to be able to keep people from repeating their past mistakes."

"One of the best things I do as a judge is see people turn around and change. We are excited," Judge Smith said.

The 11th Circuit is the second Delta district to receive a Department of Justice grant to operate drug courts. The 4th Circuit of Leflore, Sunflower and Washington counties received a \$500,000 grant from the Department of Justice on Sept. 15, 2003.

Eleven drug courts operate in Mississippi, and four are in the planning stages.

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