

Nine to graduate from George and Greene County Drug Courts

May 10, 2005

Nine people from George and Greene counties are scheduled to graduate from the Drug Court program of the 19th Circuit Court on Thursday, May 12, at 2 p.m. The ceremony will be conducted on the second floor of the George County Courthouse in Lucedale.

Circuit Judge Kathy King Jackson will preside over the graduation ceremony, which will be the first for the Drug Court program which she created Nov. 1, 2002.

Former Attorney General Mike Moore, a longtime supporter of drug courts, will be the guest speaker.

May is National Drug Court Month. Graduations are scheduled this month in numerous drug courts around the country.

Judge Jackson said the nine people who are expected to graduate are “not even like the same people” who entered the program. “I don’t think they would recognize themselves,” she said.

Drug Courts in Mississippi are special courts which seek to rehabilitate drug-using offenders through drug treatment and intense supervision with drug testing and frequent court appearances. Drug courts offer the incentive of a chance to remain out of jail, and the sanction of a jail sentence if participants fail to remain drug-free and in compliance with all program requirements. Participants are required to work, and if they dropped out of school, they must pursue a General Education Development (GED) degree.

Judge Jackson said, “It can help people change their lives. It’s the only thing I do every week that I look forward to doing. Every time I go to Drug Court, I feel better about the people.”

“It’s the most rewarding and heartbreaking thing I’ve ever done. When one fails, it breaks your heart,” she said. “But thankfully the successes outnumber the failures.”

A total of 109 people are enrolled in Drug Courts in George, Greene and Jackson counties, said Drug Court Coordinator Joanne Byrd. The Jackson County Drug Court program began accepting participants March 1, 2004.

Thirteen drug courts are in operation across the state. Others include the 2nd Circuit of Hancock, Harrison and Stone Counties; the 4th Circuit of Leflore, Sunflower and Washington counties; the 6th Circuit in Adams County; the 7th Circuit of Hinds County; the 8th Circuit of Leake, Neshoba, Newton and Scott counties; the 11th Circuit in Bolivar and Coahoma counties; the 12th Circuit of Forrest and Perry counties; the 14th Circuit of Lincoln, Pike and Walthall counties; Adams County Youth Court; DeSoto County Youth Court; Forrest County Youth Court; and Madison County Youth Court.

Drug courts have been in operation around the country for 16 years. As of December 2004, 1,621 drug courts were in operation, according to the National Association of Drug Court Professionals.

For more information about drug court programs in Mississippi, go to the web site of the Mississippi Supreme Court at www.mssc.state.ms.us and click on AOC.

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