

6th District Drug Court celebrates first graduation

January 30, 2006

The 6th Judicial District Adult Drug Court will celebrate its first graduation with a ceremony at 1 p.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 31, at the Natchez Convention Center at 211 Main Street.

Court of Appeals Judge Tyree Irving will be the keynote speaker.

Two people are set to graduate.

Circuit Judge Lillie Blackmon Sanders, who presides over the Drug Court, said, "It's a milestone. Its something we are very proud of. The program is progressing. We are still growing and learning."

The program began May 18, 2004, with five participants. A total of 38 people are now enrolled, including four who were accepted into the program last week, said Drug Court Coordinator Flavis Wiley.

The Drug Court meets weekly with participants in Natchez. Several people travel from Wilkinson County to participate. Judge Sanders said she plans to begin holding additional meetings in Woodville starting in February.

The 6th Circuit Court District includes Adams, Amite, Franklin and Wilkinson counties.

Judge Sanders said, "We have a lot of work to do, but we have made major strides."

The Drug Court program's goal is to reduce crimes committed by substance abusing offenders, to create a safer community and to improve the quality of life of participants.

Judge Sanders said, "The majority of the people in the Drug Court program haven't had any more legal problems since they have been in the program."

When a participant relapses into drug abuse, Judge Sanders takes it personally. "It's a hurting thing to everybody," she said

Judge Sanders revels in the success of the two women who are graduating. For instance, one of them has been able to become more involved in the lives of her children and their school activities.

"She has been able to enjoy those things she was missing out on," Judge Sanders said.

Drug Courts 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.

For more information about drug courts in Mississippi, go to the web site of the Mississippi Supreme Court, www.mssc.state.ms.us, then click on "AOC."

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