

## **Jackson County Drug Court to hold first graduation June 30**

June 28, 2006

The Jackson County Drug Court will hold its first graduation at 3 p.m. Friday, June 30, in the second floor courtroom of the old Jackson County Courthouse at 3104 Magnolia Street in Pascagoula.

Thirteen people are expected to graduate.

The keynote speaker will be U.S. District Judge Keith Starrett, who founded the state's first felony adult drug court in 1999 while he served as state circuit judge in Lincoln, Pike and Walthall counties. Judge Starrett, who served as a state circuit judge for 12 years, received his commission to the federal judiciary on Dec. 13, 2004, and began hearing cases in U.S. District Court in Hattiesburg on Jan 3, 2005.

Circuit Judge Kathy King Jackson will preside over the Drug Court graduation.

Judge Jackson started the Drug Court program in the 19<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court District in George and Greene counties in November 2002, and expanded the program to Jackson County in March 2004. Circuit Judge Robert Krebs began presiding over Drug Court in Jackson County in October 2004. He meets with a different group of participants.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Circuit Drug Court program has 155 active members in all programs, said Drug Court Coordinator Joanne Byrd.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Circuit Drug Court is the second largest drug court in the state, said State Drug Court Coordinator Joey Craft. The largest program is the 14<sup>th</sup> Circuit, which Judge Starrett started. The 14<sup>th</sup> Circuit program averages 170 participants under the supervision of Circuit Judge Michael Taylor of Brookhaven.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Circuit Drug Court has grown rapidly. Byrd said the program is above its intended capacity of 150 with more people waiting to be admitted. Eighteen more people have been approved to be admitted to the program, and 40 are awaiting screening interviews.

The 13 who are expected to graduate Friday will remain under supervision for another year, Byrd said. They are required to attend monthly Drug Court meetings for six more months. They are subject to be called in for drug testing at any time during the next year.

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 be employed, and the sanction of a jail sentence if participants fail to remain drug-free and in compliance with all program requirements.

Mississippi has 16 active drug court programs. For more information about drug courts in Mississippi, go to the web site of the Mississippi Supreme Court, [www.mssc.state.ms.us](http://www.mssc.state.ms.us), then click on "AOC."

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