

Ninth Circuit Drug Court graduation is Monday, Aug. 14

August 10, 2006

The Ninth Circuit Court District Drug Court will celebrate the graduation of three of its program participants at 6 p.m. Monday, Aug. 14, in the second floor courtroom of the Warren County Courthouse. The courthouse is located at 1009 Cherry Street in Vicksburg.

Sen. Mike Chaney of Vicksburg will be the guest speaker. Circuit Judge Frank Vollar will preside over the ceremony.

The Ninth Circuit Court District Drug Court was founded May 17, 2005. The program takes a minimum of a year for completion, and can take up to four years.

Fifty-two participants will remain in the program after the graduation, said Drug Court Coordinator Maryam Aziz.

Judge Vollar said that the Drug Court is an effective way to deter crime and change peoples' lives.

Judge Vollar said, "About 80 to 90 percent of our criminal cases involve drugs in some capacity. Getting the people off the drugs is the way to get some changes in their behavior. That's why drug courts are so important: to stop the revolving door of offenders committing crimes, going to prison, being released and committing new crimes, revolving through the system."

"People I never thought would change have done remarkably well," Judge Vollar said. "We get them off drugs and get them employed and working. Most of them, once we get them off drugs, like their new lives, and they like what they see in themselves."

Drug courts 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.

Participants before acceptance into the Ninth Circuit Court District Drug Court program are required to plead guilty to the charges they face. Most charges can be expunged a year after graduation if program participants maintain good behavior. Charges of felony driving under the influence of alcohol are an exception; DUI charges cannot be expunged.

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, then click on "AOC."

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