

Judge Skinner to head Hinds County Drug Court

December 18, 2006

Hinds County Court Judge William Skinner will be the new head of the Hinds County Drug Court, said Senior Circuit Judge Swan Yerger.

Judge Skinner, who will be sworn in to his elected position as Hinds County Court Judge Jan. 2, will take the position previously held by Hinds County Court Judge William Gowan. Judge Gowan served by gubernatorial appointment to fill a vacancy and did not seek election. Judge Skinner was elected to the County Court position in November.

The Hinds County Drug Court operates under the jurisdiction of the Circuit Court. Judge Yerger said he will appoint County Court Judge Skinner to preside over the Drug Court.

Judge Skinner said, "I am excited. I think Drug Courts are one of the most innovative programs the state has. My goal is to make it the Number One program in the state."

Judge Gowan will preside at the Hinds County Drug Court graduation program at 6 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 19, at the Hinds County Courthouse in Jackson. Judge Skinner is expected to attend the graduation. The program will be in Courtroom No. 1 on the second floor.

Twelve people are scheduled to graduate. It is the fifteenth graduation ceremony for the Hinds County Drug Court. Approximately 100 people have graduated from the program since it began in January 2000.

Judge Skinner said he has the advantage of stepping into a well-organized and established program. He praised the work of Drug Court Coordinator Brenda Mathis and the Drug Court staff.

Judge Skinner said that during the past six years as a Hinds County Justice Court judge, he ordered drug and alcohol assessment and required drug treatment and supervision for misdemeanor offenders in cases where drug and alcohol problems were detected. He did not operate a formal drug court program in his Justice Court, but utilized the treatment and supervision approach common to drug courts.

"We can put them in jail for drugs, and when they get out, if they haven't had treatment, they'll be back on drugs," Judge Skinner said.

He noted that the recidivism rate in his court was much better for people who got drug treatment.

Judge Skinner said jail by itself doesn't cure drug addiction, but the threat of going to jail is an incentive to motivate people with drug problems to utilize the help offered by drug courts.

"With some people, the only way to get their attention is jail," he said. In Justice Court, he sometimes ordered 30 days at the County Penal Farm for probation violators who didn't follow treatment mandates. "That gets their attention. It's a great deterrent."

At the Hinds County Drug Court, he will be dealing with felony offenders, and a lot more of them. Approximately 83 people are enrolled in the program.

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Media Contact: Beverly Pettigrew Kraft, Administrative Office of Courts, 601-354-7452