

National Drug Court leader to speak in Jackson Dec. 9

December 4, 2008

A leader in the national drug court movement will hold a press conference in Jackson at 7 p.m. Dec. 9 at the Hinds County Courthouse at 407 East Pascagoula Street.

C. West Huddleston III, chief executive officer of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals, is expected to talk about the cost savings drug courts offer for the judicial and correctional systems, and the ability of drug courts to save people from addiction.

Huddleston also will meet at 4:30 p.m. Dec. 9 with state and local officials interested in drug courts to answer their questions.

The press conference and the meeting with local officials will be in the jury deliberation room behind Courtroom No. 5 on the second floor, west wing, of the Hinds County Courthouse.

Also, at 6 p.m. Dec. 9, Huddleston will be the keynote speaker at a graduation for the Hinds County Circuit Drug Court. The ceremony will be held in Courtroom No. 1 on the second floor, east wing, of the Hinds County Courthouse.

Hinds County Court Judge William Skinner, who oversees the felony Drug Court program, will preside over the graduation ceremony. Four people are expected to graduate, said Drug Court Coordinator Brenda Mathis.

Huddleston, of Alexandria, Va., is chief executive officer of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals. NADCP is a non-profit organization which provides training, technical assistance and support for drug court professionals; collects and disseminates information about drug court programs nationwide; and advocates for the establishment, growth and funding of drug courts.

The drug court movement in Mississippi is almost 10 years old. The state currently has 28 drug courts – 20 adult programs and eight juvenile programs. Drug courts now operate in Circuit Court Districts 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, 19 and 21; in Youth Courts in Adams, DeSoto, Forrest, Hinds, Jackson, Madison, Pike and Rankin counties; in Municipal Courts in Columbia, Columbus and Jackson; and in Justice courts in Hinds and Lee counties.

Eight of those drug court programs were formed this year. The Mississippi Legislature during the 2008 Regular Session directed the State Drug Court Advisory Committee to work toward expanding drug court programs. Additional drug court programs are in the planning stages, said State Drug Court Coordinator Joey Craft.

The Hinds County Circuit Drug Court, which was founded in January 2000, is the second oldest drug court program in the state. The upcoming ceremony will be the twenty-second graduation exercise for the Hinds County Circuit program. Mathis said 150 people have graduated from the program since it began. After the upcoming graduation, 59 people will remain enrolled in the program.

Huddleston is regarded as a pioneer in drug courts and other alternative sentencing strategies. He previously served as director of the National Drug Court Institute. He began his career as a licensed clinician working with misdemeanor and felony offenders. He worked in the Tennessee and Oklahoma justice systems to develop, implement and operate in-custody and community mental health and substance abuse treatment programs. He served as the director of two community corrections programs and as the interim director of a 125-bed pre-release correctional center. He was involved in creating the first two drug courts in the state of Oklahoma, one of which served as an early mentor court for the U.S. Department of Justice.

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