

8th District Drug Court graduation scheduled December 16

December 9, 2008

Six people are expected to graduate from the Eighth Circuit Drug Court during a ceremony at 3 p.m. Dec. 16 at the Neshoba County Courthouse in Philadelphia.

Commissioner Christopher Epps of the Mississippi Department of Corrections will be the guest speaker. Circuit Judge Vernon Cotten of Carthage will preside. Drug Court Coordinator Marcus Ellis of Walnut Grove will serve as master of ceremonies.

The Eight Judicial District includes Leake, Neshoba, Newton and Scott counties. The graduates are expected to include one resident of Neshoba County, one from Newton County, and three from Leake County.

Also, one graduate lives outside the district, in Madison County. Circuit Judge Samac Richardson ordered her into the program because his district does not have a drug court, said Ellis. The woman had failed nine attempts at rehabilitation before being arrested and entering the Drug Court program, Ellis said. She has remained drug-free since she entered the Drug Court program.

Ellis, who also serves as president of the Mississippi Association of Drug Court Professionals, said, "These graduates are positive proof that drug courts work. These graduations represent a long, hard struggle to gain control of addictions, both drug and alcohol-related. They are the culmination of rehabilitation programs, extensive after-care programs, Narcotics and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, significant staff intervention via random and frequent drug testing, and intensive judicial supervision."

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.

It is the second graduation for the Eighth District Drug Court, which began in January 2004. The number of participants in the program has grown to 130.

Statewide, 1,983 people were enrolled in drug court programs in October, the latest period for which complete statistics were available, according to the Administrative Office of Courts.

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.

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