

# Judge Helfrich named to national drug court board

June 17, 2009

Circuit Judge Robert Helfrich of Hattiesburg has been appointed to the Board of Directors of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals (NADCP).

The two-year board appointment was announced at the NADCP's fifteenth annual training conference last week in Anaheim, Calif.

Judge Helfrich's appointment to the board means two Mississippi judges are now serving on the national policy making board. U.S. District Judge Keith Starrett has served on the NADCP board since June 2008.

Judge Starrett, who serves as a federal district judge in Hattiesburg, founded the state's first drug court in 1999 when he was a state trial judge in the 14<sup>th</sup> Circuit District of Lincoln, Pike and Walthall counties.

Judge Helfrich is circuit judge of the 12<sup>th</sup> District of Forrest and Perry counties. He started a drug court there in 2003.

Judge Helfrich said that he is excited about being able to work to expand drug courts around the nation. While drug courts exist in all 50 states, he estimated that drug courts nationwide are available to only about 10 percent of the people who need the help that the programs could provide.

"We want to expand...so that drug courts and problem solving courts are available to every American who needs them," Judge Helfrich said. "I'm really excited to be able to play a role in this movement."

Mississippi now has 32 drug court programs across the state. More than 2,100 people are enrolled in drug court programs around the state, according to the Administrative Office of Courts.

About 220 people are enrolled in the 12<sup>th</sup> Circuit Drug Court program.

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. Drug courts require participants to get and keep a job, do community service work, pay fines and fees, and to work toward obtaining a General Education Development (GED) degree if they dropped out of school.

The National Association of Drug Court Professionals, with headquarters in Alexandria, Va., seeks to reduce substance abuse, crime and recidivism by promoting and advocating for establishment and funding of drug courts and providing for collection and dissemination of information, technical assistance, and mutual support to association members. NADCP represents more than 20,000 drug court professionals nationwide. Its members include judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, treatment providers, rehabilitation experts, researchers, educators, law enforcement representatives, correctional representatives, pre-trial officers and probation officers.

####