

Jackson County Drug Court graduation is September 1

August 28, 2009

Two sisters are expected to be among the graduates when the Jackson County Drug Court honors participants Sept. 1 in Pascagoula. The Jackson County Drug Court will conduct a graduation at 4 p.m. in the large courtroom of the old Jackson County Courthouse at 3104 Magnolia Street.

Circuit Judge Robert Krebs will preside. Nine people are expected to graduate. One of the sisters and another graduate will be the guest speakers.

In the case of the sisters, drug use ran in their family. One of their two brothers is a participant in a different Drug Court group, also in Jackson County, said Drug Court Case Manager Margaret Chapman. The other brother is serving a prison sentence.

Having family members in the Drug Court program together is not unusual. Last year, a father graduated from the Jackson County program in August and his son graduated in December. Husbands and wives, parents and children have been in drug court programs together in Jackson County and in other areas of the state.

Drug use among family members is not unusual. In the case of the father and son who graduated earlier, Chapman said, the father stated that the son used drugs with him because it was a way to spend time together. "It's a vicious cycle," she said.

Family ties are also one of the things that makes it so difficult for addicts to stay clean and sober, even after they enter a drug court program, Chapman said. One of the core principles of drug court is that participants have to change their "people, places and things." That means no longer associating with the same old friends whose habits can cause them to slide back into drug use.

"That's how we lose most of them. They don't change people places or things. When it's your family, it's kind of hard to change," Chapman said.

However, in the case of the sisters who are graduating, they became a source of support for each other, Chapman said.

The sisters, ages 38 and 42, are from Vancleave. They came into the program at different times, one in November 2006 and the other in January 2007. They were arrested separately. Both had used methamphetamine.

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 be employed, and the sanction of a jail sentence if participants fail to remain drug-free and in compliance with all program requirements.

All three circuit judges of the 19th Circuit Court District oversee Drug Court programs and meet with a group of participants. Judge Kathy King Jackson started the Drug Court program in George and Greene counties in November 2002, and expanded the program to Jackson County in March 2004. Judge Robert Krebs began presiding over Drug Court in Jackson County in October 2004. Judge Dale Harkey began his Drug Court program in July 2006.

There are 32 drug courts in operation across the state – 22 adult court programs and 10 juvenile programs. About 2,300 people are currently enrolled in drug court programs statewide.

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