

## **17<sup>th</sup> District Drug Court graduation is Oct. 19 in Hernando**

October 6, 2009

Mississippi Supreme Court Justice Ann H. Lamar will be the guest speaker Oct. 19 at the first graduation ceremony of the 17<sup>th</sup> Circuit Drug Court. The ceremony is scheduled for 2 p.m. in the main courtroom at the DeSoto County Courthouse, 2535 U.S. Highway 51 in Hernando.

Thirteen people are expected to graduate, said Drug Court Coordinator Craig Sheley. Circuit Judges Robert P. Chamberlin and Jimmy McClure will preside.

Judge Chamberlin said that he is pleased with the success of the Drug Court program. "It is my sincere hope and belief that the graduates of this program will be valuable assets in their communities. Our aim is that they be reliable workers, regular taxpayers, dependable parents and trustworthy members of their neighborhoods. If our program helps in reaching these goals, then the results will be reward enough," Judge Chamberlin said.

Judge McClure said, "Drug Court programs work. These graduates prove that. Families are able to stay together."

Justice Lamar said that she looks forward to addressing the graduates, some of whom she originally placed in the Drug Court program. The former 17<sup>th</sup> District Circuit Judge presided over Drug Court proceedings in Panola, Tallahatchie, Tate and Yalobusha counties before she was appointed to the Supreme Court.

Justice Lamar said, "We had very high hopes for the program when we began, and it has proven to be better than we could have imagined. We have seen lives changed, not only for the participants, but also for their families. The participants have been given an opportunity to start over again drug-free. We hope that they leave the program with the skills and the confidence they need to put drugs behind them.

"I applaud Judge Chamberlin and Judge McClure for the work they continue to do in our drug courts. I've seen it make a tremendous difference in the lives of the participants and also in the communities they represent. I've participated in several drug court graduations, but this one will be very special for me," Justice Lamar said.

The 17<sup>th</sup> Circuit Drug Court received its certification in March 2006. Judge Chamberlin started accepting participants into the program in DeSoto County in August 2006. Soon afterwards, Judge Lamar began presiding over the Drug Court in Panola, Tallahatchie, Tate and Yalobusha counties. Judge McClure took over supervision of Drug Court participants from the lower four counties of the district after Justice Lamar was appointed to the Supreme Court.

Sheley said that 205 participants are currently enrolled in the program. This is the first group to graduate from the 17<sup>th</sup> Circuit Drug Court. The program takes three years to complete.

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.

Participants in the 17<sup>th</sup> Circuit Drug Court must plead guilty to the charges and pay for their own drug treatment. They may be sent to a residential treatment program or placed in intensive out-patient treatment for one to three months. After completing treatment, participants meet weekly with the judge and submit to weekly drug screening. They are subject to intensive supervision by a probation officer. They must remain employed and pay fines as well as a \$100 monthly fee to participate. Meetings and drug testing are less frequent for those who successfully progress to later phases of the program.

There are 32 drug courts in operation across the state – 22 adult court programs and 10 juvenile programs.

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