

Drug Courts of 17th Circuit and Hinds Youth Court win awards

May 21, 2012

The Mississippi Association of Drug Court Professionals recently honored the 17th Circuit Drug Court, the Hinds County Youth Drug Court and Hinds County Court Judge William Skinner.

The 17th Circuit Drug Court was recognized as Adult Drug Court of the Year for the state of Mississippi. The Hinds County Youth Drug Court was named Juvenile Drug Court of the Year. Hinds County Court Judge William Skinner, who supervises the Juvenile Drug Court, was honored as 2012 Drug Court Professional of the Year.

The awards were presented May 11 in Hattiesburg during the Mississippi Association of Drug Court Professionals eighth annual statewide conference. May is National Drug Court Month.

The 17th Circuit Drug Court was recognized “for service to the citizens of the 17th Circuit District and their commitment to improving the quality of life for participants in the program.” The 17th Circuit includes DeSoto, Panola, Tallahatchie, Tate and Yalobusha counties.

Circuit Judges Robert Chamberlin of Hernando and Jimmy McClure of Sardis accepted the award. Judge Chamberlin supervises Drug Court participants in DeSoto County. Judge McClure supervises participants from Panola, Tallahatchie, Tate and Yalobusha counties. Drug Court Coordinator Craig Sheley works with participants from the entire district.

Judge Chamberlin said, “I am very honored by this award. I think it recognizes the tremendous job being done by Craig Sheley and the entire drug court staff.”

The 17th Circuit Drug Court is the largest drug court in the state, with more than 280 people enrolled. The program, founded in 2006, has one of the toughest regimens among felony adult drug courts. To graduate, participants have to have remained drug free for three years. Anyone who tests positive for drugs at any point during the program starts over at Phase Two with twice weekly drug screening and weekly meetings with the judge.

Judge Skinner was recognized “for his untiring effort, dedication and unlimited compassion of assisting others to overcome their addictions to alcohol and drugs.”

The Hinds County Youth Drug Court was honored “for service to the juveniles of Hinds County and for their commitment to improving the quality of life for the participants in the program.” Forty juveniles are currently enrolled in the program.

Judge Skinner created the Hinds County Youth Drug Court in April 2007, shortly after he took office as a Hinds County Court Judge. He simultaneously supervised the juvenile and felony adult drug courts of Hinds County until January 2011, when felony adult drug court participants were assigned to the supervision of Circuit Judge Winston Kidd.

Mississippi has 43 drug court programs with 3,232 people currently enrolled. That includes 2,525 enrolled in felony adult drug courts, 409 in youth drug courts, 104 in family drug courts and 194 in misdemeanor drug court programs. Drug courts operate in Circuit, Chancery, Youth, Justice and Municipal courts.

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.

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