

Drug Court conference to be held in Tunica May 22-24

May 15, 2013

The volatile combinations of drug abuse, mental illness and family violence are among topics to be discussed at the Mississippi Association of Drug Court Professionals Conference, which will be held May 22-24 at Harrah's Conference Center in Tunica.

Tracy Swafford of Cleveland, president of MADCP and drug court coordinator for the 11th Circuit Drug Court, Circuit Judge Al Smith III of Cleveland and Mississippi Supreme Court Chief Justice Bill Waller Jr. of Jackson will open the conference at 1 p.m. May 22.

Chief Justice Waller said he looks forward to having the opportunity to greet drug court team members from all over the state. For several years, he pushed for statewide coverage of drug courts, and saw that goal become a reality earlier this year. The state has 44 drug courts. All 22 Mississippi Circuit Court districts have drug courts. The state also has 15 juvenile programs, five misdemeanor level programs and two family treatment courts.

Chief Justice Waller said, "It's a great day for the citizens of Mississippi that drug courts are available in every judicial district of the state. The cost savings are significant, but the difference it makes in the lives of the participants and their families is the reason they are successful."

During the opening session of the conference, two north Mississippi drug court graduates will tell their stories of struggle and change. Chief Justice Waller said that the powerful human stories from drug court participants are an inspiration for all people who continue to battle addiction, and for the drug court team members who help guide them to clean and sober lives.

The ninth annual conference runs May 22-24. About 300 people, including judges, drug court staff, law enforcement, correctional officers and drug treatment providers, are expected to attend, said State Drug Court Coordinator Joey Craft.

The conference will include presentations from mental health and drug treatment professionals, judges, court staff and law enforcement. Presentations will cover current drug abuse trends, prescription drugs, DUI's in drug court, gangs, drug treatment issues for adults and adolescents, addiction and mental illness, ethics, and trauma.

Several presentations will focus on development of drug court programs which recognize and take into account the physical and emotional trauma which many drug court participants have experienced. Domestic violence survivor Sharon D. Wise of Washington, D.C., will speak at 2:15 p.m. May 22. Wise, who was diagnosed as mentally ill at age nine, spent many years in and out of hospitals, institutions and jails. Wise, an artist, turned her traumatic experiences into a teaching tool. At 3:30 p.m. May 22, Joe Madonia, a licensed clinical social worker and co-director of the Brooklyn, N.Y., Treatment Court Training Academy, will talk about creating a trauma informed drug court.

Many of the people who land in drug court feel helpless and hopeless, Swafford said. They are depressed, and they have little self-esteem.

"We are dealing with people who think they are not good enough to have a good partner. They just keep taking the abuse," Swafford said. "They know that they have let down their families. Even the drugs no longer make them feel good."

A schedule of all conference sessions and speakers is available at this link:
<http://www.cvent.com/events/2013-madcp-annual-training-conference/custom-17-25fe9397d4f343779213004fbdc70cf0.aspx>.

May is National Drug Court Month and National Mental Health Awareness Month.

####