

19th Circuit Drug Court to hold graduation Feb. 25 in Pascagoula

February 20, 2014

Two Gulf Coast Drug Court graduates will talk about their long road to recovery during a ceremony at 1 p.m. Feb. 25 at the Old Jackson County Courthouse on Magnolia Street in Pascagoula. The ceremony will be in the old Circuit Court courtroom.

Seven people are expected to graduate from the 19th Circuit Drug Court. Circuit Judge Robert P. Krebs will preside. The public is invited.

The seven graduates include at least one who sailed through the program without a hitch in two years – the minimum time it takes to complete the Drug Court program. But the two speakers at next week's ceremonies took a lot longer.

Judge Krebs sent both of them to the Regimented Inmate Discipline Program (RID) after they experienced problems while under supervision of the Drug Court. After they returned to the Drug Court, "both of them have done everything they have been asked to do and expected to do, and more," he said.

Judge Krebs said that he is proud of them for their hard work and perseverance. "Everybody's journey is different. If they get to the same place that they need to be, it's just rewarding. It takes some of them longer to get to that point than others. There is no magic formula. You can't do a cookie cutter Drug Court. You have to see them as individuals and work with them as best as you can."

Helping people work their way out of the grip of drug addiction means giving second chances. Judge Krebs said, "You are engaged in a certain type of behavior modification, and these people have been doing what they have been doing wrong for a lot of years, during their formative years. Instead of building up moral values and principles, they were concentrating on something entirely different than most people, so they are having to...develop a life view that they should have gotten when they were far younger."

Drug courts seek to rehabilitate drug-using offenders through drug treatment and intense supervision with frequent court appearances and drug testing. Drug courts offer the incentive of a chance to remain out of jail and be employed and the sanction of a prison sentence if participants fail to remain drug-free and in compliance with all program requirements.

Drug Court requirements include paying all fines and fees, keeping a job and doing community service work. The seven graduates paid a total of \$34,788.20 in fines and court costs and performed 2,242 hours of community service work, said Drug Court Coordinator Joanne Byrd.

Participants must earn a GED if they don't already have a high school diploma. The 19th Circuit Drug Court also requires participants to spend an hour a week at the library and read a book a month from a list provided by the court. John Grisham novels are a favorite. "Most had never read a book cover to cover" before they came to Drug Court," Judge Krebs said.

Mississippi currently has 38 drug courts. About 3,400 people are enrolled in drug courts statewide.

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