

Third Circuit Drug Court graduation is Feb. 14 in Oxford

February 10, 2017

A dozen north Mississippi people will give their families a powerful Valentine's Day gift when they graduate from the Third Judicial District Drug Court.

The ceremony will be held at 2 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 14 in the second floor courtroom at the Lafayette County Courthouse in Oxford.

Eight other program participants who are nearing completion of the program's requirements will be recognized during the ceremony, said Drug Court Coordinator Brandon Vance. Those eight participants are expected to fulfill all their obligations for graduation by May 19. Each participant must spend at least three years under the supervision of the Drug Court and comply with all program requirements before being eligible to graduate.

Circuit Judge Andrew K. Howorth will preside over the ceremony. The guest speaker will be Rod Farrar, clinical director of Stonewater Adolescent Addiction Recovery Center in Oxford. Two of the graduates also will speak.

The public is invited.

The Third Judicial District Drug Court currently has 245 participants from Lafayette, Benton, Calhoun, Chickasaw, Marshall, Tippah and Union counties. Due to the large size of the program and the distance that participants must travel, a second Drug Court office was established in Ripley. Judge Howorth supervises participants assigned to the program in Oxford, and Circuit Judge Kelly Luther supervises the group in Ripley.

The mission of the Third District Drug Court is to enhance public safety by providing substance abusers with cost-effective, multi-disciplinary alternatives, including substance abuse treatment and monitoring. The mission also includes improving participants' quality of life and returning those participants to the community as productive, law-abiding citizens; reducing the rate of recidivism; and breaking the drug addiction cycle.

Drug courts seek to rehabilitate drug-using offenders through drug treatment and intense supervision with frequent court appearances and random 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.

Mississippi currently has 41 drug courts. There are 22 adult felony programs, with a drug court operating in every Circuit Court district in the state. There are 13 juvenile programs, three misdemeanor programs and three family courts. Drug courts may operate within Circuit Courts, Chancery Courts, Youth Courts, Justice Courts or Municipal Courts. About 3,670 people are enrolled in drug courts. The state's drug courts are estimated to produce \$46 million in annual savings by avoiding incarceration costs of those drug court participants.

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