

4th Circuit Drug Court schedules graduation and prepares to expand program

August 16, 2006

The Fourth Circuit Drug Court Program is preparing for a graduation on Monday, Aug. 21, in Greenwood. The ceremony is scheduled for 2 p.m. in the Circuit Courtroom at the Leflore County Courthouse at 310 West Market Street.

Tammy I. Shelton of the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance will be the guest speaker. Shelton is chief of the National Project Management Desk.

Eleven Drug Court graduates are expected to be recognized. Sixty-one people are enrolled in the Fourth Circuit Drug Court program, said Drug Court Coordinator Lisa Washington.

While the graduates will mark a milestone in their progress, the Fourth Circuit Drug Court program itself is moving up to another level. Drug Court judges and staff are working to implement a special DUI component to deal with felony offenders arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol.

Circuit Judge Margaret Carey-McCray said a special program for DUI offenders is needed within the Drug Court “to more effectively provide recovery services to people who are suffering from the effects of alcoholism.”

Washington said, “It’s a different kind of disease we are dealing with. We want to do something specialized to that problem.”

Judge Carey-McCray, Circuit Judge Betty W. Sanders, Washington and seven other members of the Fourth Circuit Drug Court team attended a DUI Court enhancement training program in Jackson on Aug. 7. The day-long seminar was intended to help Drug Court programs develop and implement a program for DUI offenders. Representatives of five Mississippi state drug court programs participated in the seminar, which was sponsored by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the National Drug Court Institute

Judge Sanders at the conclusion of the training program said, “We now see how we can better serve those individuals.”

Other Fourth Circuit Drug Court team members attending the Aug. 7 DUI Court enhancement training were: Greenwood Police Sgt. Demetrice Bedell, Drug Court Supervising Officer Jeff Dunn of Greenwood, Washington County Sheriff’s Deputy Tommy Flanagan of Greenville, Drug Court Administrative Assistant Mary Ann Jones of Greenville, Drug Court Lead Supervising Officer Laverne Simpson of Greenville, and treatment counselors Sullivan Watson of Greenville and Lee Williams of Leland.

The Fourth Circuit Court District includes Leflore, Sunflower and Washington counties.

Two of the state’s 16 drug courts already have special programs which accept people charged with felony DUI offenses. DUI offenders are required to plead guilty to the charges.

Drug Courts are special courts which 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 the sanction of a jail sentence if participants fail to remain drug-free and in compliance with all program requirements. Participants are required to work, and if they dropped out of school, they must pursue a General Education Development (GED) degree.

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