

DeSoto County Juvenile Drug Court Graduation is March 1

February 22, 2010

The DeSoto County Juvenile Drug Court will hold a graduation at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, March 1, at the DeSoto County Courthouse in Hernando. The ceremony will be in Courtroom No. 4 on the second floor, south wing. The courthouse is located at 2535 Highway 51 South.

Seven juveniles are expected to graduate. About 30 will remain enrolled.

Circuit Court Judge Robert P. Chamberlin will be the guest speaker. DeSoto County Court Judge Allen B. Couch Jr. will preside. A reception sponsored by the DeSoto County Junior Auxiliary will follow the graduation ceremony.

Members of the news media are invited to attend the graduation. Reporters, photographers and editors are reminded that participants are juveniles and the program is a Youth Court proceeding. **Because of the confidentiality required by law in Mississippi Youth Court matters, members of the media are asked to refrain from publishing or broadcasting any information or photographs which would in any way identify any juvenile participant or family member.**

Drug courts are special courts which seek to rehabilitate drug-using offenders through drug treatment, drug testing, intense supervision, and educational requirements. Most of the DeSoto County graduates have spent about a year under supervision of the Drug Court.

They start out in treatment. If out-patient care isn't enough, in-patient treatment of up to nine months may be used, Judge Couch said.

In addition to staying clean and sober, participants must work toward finishing high school or getting a General Education Development (GED) degree. Some of the participants are enrolled in college.

Judge Couch said, "We attack it from all angles, with the drug treatment, the education and the personal responsibility and behavior." Testing clean on a drug test isn't enough. "Unless they show success in all of those areas, they are not graduating," he said.

"We really stress education and personal responsibility," Judge Couch said. "They don't leave the program until they have either graduated (high school) or have a GED, and have put themselves into place to take that next step, whether it be a job or higher education or both. That has been one of the most gratifying aspects of this program, knowing that at a minimum we've helped them reach that benchmark in their education."

Most of the participants struggled at first, Judge Couch said. "Most of them probably wish they had just received whatever sentence or punishment was in line for them, because they find that Drug Court is much more demanding of them," he said.

"It's one of the more rewarding parts of my job, to see these kids come in at rock bottom and leave the program in a position to do successful things," Judge Couch said.

The DeSoto County Juvenile Drug Court was established in January 2005. Mississippi has 13 juvenile drug court programs and 21 adult drug court programs.

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