

Third Circuit Drug Court graduation is Feb. 16 in Oxford

February 11, 2016

Mississippi Judicial College Director and former Supreme Court Justice Randy Pierce will be the guest speaker at the Third Circuit Drug Court graduation ceremony scheduled for 2 p.m. Feb. 16 at the Lafayette County Courthouse in Oxford. The ceremony will be in the main courtroom.

Circuit Judge Andrew K. Howorth will preside. The public is invited.

Eighteen people are expected to graduate. It will be the tenth graduation ceremony for the program that Judge Howorth started in 2008.

The Third Circuit Drug Court currently enrolls 211 participants from Lafayette, Benton, Calhoun, Chickasaw, Marshall, Tippah and Union counties, said Drug Court Coordinator Brandon Vance. 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.

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 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 42 drug courts. There are 22 adult felony programs, with a drug court operating in every Circuit Court district in the state. There are 14 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 3,500 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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