

# 4<sup>th</sup> Circuit Drug Court schedules graduation

July 27, 2007

When graduation rolls around on Monday in Greenville, two of the nine people completing the Fourth Circuit Drug Court Program can attest that their journey to being drug free was no easy path in more ways than one.

Two of the graduates spent nearly two years pedaling a bicycle to get to Drug Court meetings, drug testing appointments, counseling and work, said Drug Court Coordinator Lisa Washington. One also rode his bicycle to attend General Education Development (GED) classes.

“Sun, rain or sleet – they didn’t make any excuses,” Washington said. “They were always on time. They were determined.”

At the start of the program, they rode a bicycle every day to meet some obligation of the program. Required meetings diminish as participants progress through the program.

One of the men lives in Greenwood, and the other lives in Greenville. They attended meetings locally. Neither could afford a car.

The Greenville resident’s bicycle was stolen while he was taking a drug test. Another Drug Court participant lent him another bicycle, Washington said.

Washington doesn’t expect the two to ride bicycles to graduation, though. The Greenville man recently got a car. The one from Greenwood plans to catch a ride with someone else.

**The Fourth Circuit Drug Court graduation is scheduled for 2 p.m. Monday, July 30, in Greenville. The program will be held in the second floor Circuit Courtroom at the Washington County Courthouse at 900 Washington Avenue.**

The guest speaker will be U.S. District Judge Keith Starrett, who founded Mississippi’s first felony drug court in 1999 when he was a circuit judge in Lincoln, Pike and Walthall counties.

Circuit Judge Margaret Carey-McCray of Greenville will preside over the ceremony. Judges Betty W. Sanders of Greenwood and Ashley Hines of Greenville will also participate.

Sixty-four people are enrolled in the Fourth Circuit Drug Court program, Washington said.

The nine graduates include three each from Leflore, Sunflower and Washington counties. They range in age from 18 to 59.

Washington noted that several of the graduates had been through drug treatment programs before they were accepted into Drug Court. Drug Court reinforces treatment with the threat of jail.

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 GED certificate.

Nineteen drug courts operate across the state. There are 14 adult drug courts and five juvenile drug courts.

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