

S U P E R I O R C O U R T O F N E W J E R S E Y
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NEWS

For Immediate Release

April 27, 2006

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Middlesex County Drug Court Celebrates National Drug Court Month with Commencement Ceremony

Robert Mason from S.T.R.I.V.E. Slated To Deliver Keynote Address

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ - In celebration of National Drug Court Month, the Middlesex County Drug Court will hold its 2nd commencement ceremony on Tues., May 2, 2006 at 1:30 p.m. in the Middlesex County Courthouse, room 201, located at 1 JFK Square in New Brunswick. Five participants will be awarded certificates marking their completion of Phase III of a rigorous 5-year program of comprehensive drug treatment and intensive supervision. Participants who reach commencement experience a reduction in the intensity of monitoring, which is one of the key components of the drug court program. While remaining under drug court supervision, they are required to attend drug court sessions quarterly and to report to their probation officer monthly.

Judge Frederick P. DeVesa, presiding judge of the Criminal Division, will be providing the opening remarks at this special event. Judge Deborah J. Venezia, who presides over the Middlesex County Drug Court, will officiate the commencement ceremony. Robert Mason, outreach coordinator and lead trainer for S.T.R.I.V.E, Support & Training Results in Valuable Employees, will deliver the keynote address.

The Middlesex County Drug Court began participation in the statewide drug court program on Sept. 14, 2004. Drug court is a departure from the way in which non-violent, substance-dependent offenders are dealt with in the criminal justice system. The program encourages full-time employment, education, responsibility, family reunification, and involvement with self-help organizations. Currently there are 83 Middlesex County Drug Court participants.

The drug court program is a highly specialized team process that functions within the Criminal Division of the Superior Court to address non-violent drug-related cases. Drug courts operate in every vicinage in New Jersey and currently serve 2,371 people statewide. Since the program's inception, offenders have found employment and begun meeting their financial obligations; parents have regained custody of their children; and dozens of drug-free babies have been born to participants around the state. The mission of the drug courts is to stop the abuse of alcohol and other drugs and related criminal activity. Participants enter the program in lieu of serving prison time.

Drug courts are unique in the criminal justice environment because they build a working relationship between criminal justice and drug treatment agencies. Eligible defendants receive a sentence of 3 to 5 years of probation, with the requirement that they complete drug treatment and all aftercare requirements, attend self-help meetings and weekly drug court sessions; comply with random drug tests; pay legal obligations and obtain employment. Participants are closely monitored by designated drug court probation officers as they transition through four phases of recovery over the course of their sentence and eventual graduation from the drug court program.

New Jersey's drug courts have proven effective at breaking the cycle of drug abuse and crime, providing people who have drug addictions the opportunity to become productive citizens. They offer an effective alternative to incarceration for non-violent offenders, and they help reduce minority over-representation in prison. More information on drug courts can be found on the Judiciary Web site at www.njcourtsonline.com.

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