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Middlesex County Drug Court Celebrates Seventh Graduation Ceremony

Art Display by Drug Court Participants

The Middlesex County Drug Court will hold its seventh graduation ceremony on Friday, May 3, at 10 a.m. in the jury room of the Middlesex County Courthouse, 56 Paterson St., New Brunswick. A total of 29 participants will be awarded certificates marking their completion of the final phase of a rigorous 3- to 5-year program of comprehensive drug treatment and intensive supervision.

Assignment Judge Travis L. Francis will deliver the welcome. Judge Lorraine Pullen, who presides over the Middlesex County Drug Court, will officiate. Judge Dennis Nieves will give remarks about the success of the program. After the ceremony, there will be a reception that will include an art exhibit featuring stained glass pieces, paintings, drawings, and poetry created by program participants.

The mission of drug courts is to stop the abuse of alcohol and other drugs and related criminal activity. Participants enter the program instead of serving prison time.

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 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 three to five 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, meet legal obligations and obtain employment. Participants are closely monitored by designated drug court probation officers as they transition through four phases of recovery during their sentence and eventual graduation from the 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.

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.

Since Middlesex County's drug court program began in September 2004, 75 participants have graduated. Of these graduates, six regained custody of children; 34 received their New Jersey driver's licenses back; and 46 were eligible for medical benefits with their jobs. A total of $175,770 was collected from those graduates from penalties, fines, and fees. Nineteen graduates improved their level of education or obtained vocational training.

Drug courts operate in every county in New Jersey and serve more than 4,800 people statewide. There are 311 Middlesex County Drug Court participants.

More information on drug courts can be found at njcourts.com.

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