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Morris/Sussex Drug Courts Celebrate National Drug Court Month

The Morris/Sussex Vicinage will honor the successes of its drug court participants in both counties.

On May 27, the Morris County Drug Court program will hold a commencement and graduation ceremony at 2 p.m. in the Dragonetti Auditorium of the County College of Morris, 214 Center Grove Rd., Randolph. Sixteen participants will commence to the fourth and final phase of the drug court program and six will graduate. Judge James DeMarzo, who presides over the Morris County Drug Court, will host the graduation. Jonathan Bell, the Morris/Sussex chief probation officer, will be the keynote speaker.

On June 2, the Sussex County Drug Court program will hold a commencement and graduation ceremony at 10 a.m. in the Performing Arts Center at the Sussex County Community College. Dr. Paul Mazur, the president of the college, will welcome honorees and guests. Fourteen participants will commence to the fourth and final phase of the drug court program and two will graduate. Judge DeMarzo, who also presides over Sussex County Drug Court, will host the graduation. Michael DeLeon, founder of Steered Straight, Inc., will be the keynote speaker.

The ceremonies celebrate the completion by the graduates of a rigorous program of comprehensive treatment, intensive supervision and strict accountability.

Drug courts began in New Jersey in the late 1990s. By September 2004, programs were in operation in every county. Like the other drug courts in New Jersey and around the United States, the Morris/Sussex drug courts hear cases of offenders charged with drug-related crimes. Drug courts divert participants from state prisons into community-based treatment programs, where they must undergo random and frequent drug testing, intensive probation supervision, and regular court reporting.

Drug courts are a highly-specialized team process that functions within the existing Superior Court structure to address nonviolent drug related cases. They are unique in the criminal justice environment because they build a close collaborative relationship between criminal justice and drug treatment professionals. Within a cooperative courtroom atmosphere, the judge heads a team of court staff, attorneys, probation officers, substance abuse evaluators, and treatment counselors who work in concert to support and monitor a participant's recovery.

Hard-working drug court participants are publicly acknowledged and encouraged, while non-compliant participants can be subjected to sanctions, including prison.

Morris County has more than 150 participants and Sussex County has more than 125 participants. The program helps to restore lives, reunite families, and make communities safer.

For more information about the drug court program or the commencement ceremonies, contact Jennifer Gulden, drug court coordinator, at 973-326-6997.

Reporters and photographers are invited to attend.

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