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Essex Drug Court Celebrates Five Years of Success As Eight Participants Graduate on June 21

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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David Toma, Famous through TV Series, is Guest Speaker

Newark, NJY - The success of Essex County's drug court will be reflected Thursday in the faces of eight men and women who will accept certificates from Judge Michael R. Casale and walk out of the Essex County Courthouse here into a new world of opportunity and freedom from addiction.

The Fifth Commencement of the Essex Vicinage Drug Court at 2 p.m. June 21 "will be as special as every other graduation" said Judge Casale, the Essex Vicinage Drug Court Judge. AFamilies, loved ones, children will all be on hand, and there will be tears and laughter. But there's a big difference. For these men and women, graduation may mean the difference between life and death."

Guest speaker for commencement will be someone who has seen first-hand the devastation that crime and addiction can cause in people's lives: David Toma, the heavyweight boxing champion and former Newark police detective whose exciting career inspired two 1970s television series, Baretta and Toma.

"We are privileged to bring David Toma, who is considered one of the nation's most powerful motivational speakers, to address our graduates and their families," Judge Casale said.

"Drug Court affords its participants an opportunity to break once and for all the vicious cycle of drug addiction," said Assignment Judge Joseph A. Falcone. "The intense supervision and hands-on approach of the program has proven successful as evidenced by the number of graduates who continue to live productive, drug-free lives. The cost savings to society, while significant, is secondary to the benefits realized, both emotionally and financially, by the successful candidates."

Part of the New Jersey Judiciary, the Essex Vicinage Drug Court program started in May 1997, the second such program in New Jersey. Drug court is a special court dedicated exclusively to cases involving drug-using offenders. Drug court offers comprehensive supervision, drug testing, treatment and immediate sanctions and incentives. The program involves a team approach on the part of judges, prosecutors, defense counsel, probation officers, law enforcement and correctional personnel, educational and vocational experts, substance abuse treatment specialists, community leaders and others.

The Essex County program currently has 120 participants and has graduated 65 individuals during the past four graduations. Eighty percent of the current participants are men. Types of charges against participants include controlled dangerous substances near or on school property and burglary.

One of the first graduates came into the program with a 30-year history of drug abuse. Coming into the program with numerous medical problems, she was admitted and completed the program in 18 months. Today, she is employed in a

halfway house in Newark, a position she obtained through the drug court program.

"Currently, the system we have for dealing with drug addicted individuals seems to be ineffective." says the Hon. Harold W. Fullilove, Presiding Judge of the Essex Vicinage Criminal Division. "Drug Courts have become more creative and try new ways to work with drug addicted individuals to break the cycle of drug addiction. The team approach by the courts and other agencies and personnel can help to stop addiction and crime at the root and help to turn people's lives around and improve the quality of life for everyone."

Key contributors to the Essex program's success include Assignment Judge Joseph A. Falcone, Presiding Judge Casale, staff of the Essex criminal and probation divisions, and staff from the Essex prosecutor's and public defender's office. Key participating treatment providers include Integrity House and CURA, Inc., in Newark; Straight and Narrow in Passaic; and Damon House in New Brunswick.

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