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### **Morris/Sussex Vicinage to Celebrate Drug Court Graduation**

The Sussex County Drug Court will hold a commencement and graduation ceremony on Tuesday, May 21 at 10 a.m. at the Historic Courthouse, 3 High St., Newton.

Five participants will commence to the fourth and final phase of the drug court program, and three will graduate. Superior Court Judge N. Peter Conforti, who presides over the Sussex County Drug Court, will host the graduation. Alexandra Knight will be the keynote speaker.

On May 23, the Morris County Drug Court will hold a commencement and graduation ceremony at 1:30 p.m. in the Octagon Theater at the Mahoney Library, College of Saint Elizabeth, 2 Convent Rd., Morristown. Twelve participants will commence to the fourth and final phase of the drug court program, and eight will graduate.

Superior Court Judge Philip Maenza, former Morris County Drug Court judge, will host the graduation. He will be joined by Superior Court Judge Michael Paul Wright, who has presided over drug court. Drug court graduate Andrew Bell 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 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 time.

Drug courts began in New Jersey in the late 1990s. By September 2004, programs were in operation in every county of the state. 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.

Morris County has more than 120 participants, and Sussex County has more than 110 active cases. 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 Charles C. Johnson Jr., drug court coordinator, at 973-326-6997.

Reporters and photographers are invited to attend.

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