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Morris/Sussex Drug Courts Hold Commencement and Graduation Ceremonies

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

On Oct. 21, the Sussex County Drug Court program will hold a commencement and graduation ceremony at 2 p.m. in the Student Theater at the Sussex County Community College, One College Hill Rd., Newton. Five participants will commence to the fourth and final phase of the drug court program and 11 will graduate. Dr. Paul Mazur, president of Sussex County Community College, will welcome honorees and guests. Presiding Criminal Part Judge Stuart A. Minkowitz, who presides over the drug courts in both counties, will host the graduation. Glen King, executive director of Freedom House Halfway House, will be the keynote speaker.

On Oct. 23, the Morris County Drug Court program will hold its ceremony at 2 p.m. in the Bickford Theater at the Morris Museum, 6 Normandy Heights Rd., Morristown. Linda Moore, director of the Morris Museum, will welcome honorees and guests. A total of 13 participants will commence to the fourth and final phase of the drug court program and 13 will graduate. Judge Minkowitz, will host the event. Retired statewide drug court manager Carol Venditto 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 of the state. Like the other drug courts in New Jersey and around the country, the Morris and 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 time.

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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