



NEWS RELEASE
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DWI COURT GRADUATION –
A TRIUMPH FOR PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY & PUBLIC SAFETY

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. – Greene County Prosecuting Attorney Dan Patterson announces that last night, August 8, 2012, he returned from annual training with his Missouri Army National Guard unit at Fort Leonard Wood to attend the Greene County Driving While Intoxicated Court graduation. Approximately 250 people including: DWI Court defendants, family members, friends and supporters gathered last night at the O'Reilly Cancer Center in Springfield for a unique court session to celebrate the graduation of fourteen men and two women from the Greene County DWI Court. Also attending the graduation were representatives of national organizations studying the success of Greene County's national academy court.

As with a normal court, an armed bailiff was present and the proceedings were presided over by a judge, the Honorable Peggy Davis. That, however, is where any resemblance to a normal court session ended. During the proceedings Judge Davis called each of the graduates forward to receive a certificate of completion. Each graduate was joined on stage by his or her probation officer and substance abuse counselor. After being congratulated by Judge Davis, each graduate spoke to the assembled crowd, thanked his or her supporters, offered advice to current defendants and took personal responsibility for his or her actions.

While we have the greatest criminal justice system in the world, one of the unfortunate side effects of the adversarial nature of that system is that defendants rarely take full personal responsibility for their acts. Instead they often seek to simply get the best deal they can so they can go on with their lives. As each graduate spoke, however, it was clear that these defendants and this court are different. A common theme to their experiences was quickly evident. Many spoke of feeling forced into DWI Court, having failed in other treatment programs, and they were expecting to once again

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fly under the radar, beat the system or do their time, and return to their old lives and habits.

DWI Court, however, is not soft on crime and is difficult to beat. Instead, it is more demanding than standard probation or straight jail time. Defendants begin with weekly court appearances, treatment sessions, substance abuse testing and sobriety meetings. While defendants are recognized by the DWI Court for successes, they are also held accountable for their actions and immediately sanctioned for failures and violations. For many, who have been in and out of jail and prison, doing their time would be easier than completing the DWI Court. Many initially try to avoid being sentenced to DWI Court in the first place. One graduate spoke of entering the program and feeling like he had received a “death sentence.” This forty-something defendant began as a weekend drinker at thirteen, received his first DWI at fifteen, and was entering his fourth alcohol program. He initially did not like the accountability that DWI Court demands, and spoke of his frustration when he could not fool the DWI Court team with his old scams and lines. He described the frustration of needing a full-time driver and of trying to hold a job that could accommodate the DWI Court’s constant demands on his time. Eventually, however, he found that the DWI Court’s system of treatment and sanctions forced him to “dry up.” Like others, he thanked his family present for their support and, without blaming others, the government or society, took full personal responsibility for his actions.

The crime of DWI presents a clear public safety threat. National statistics reveal that:

- 1 in 3 people will be involved in an alcohol related crash in their lifetime
- Drunk drivers kill someone approximately every 48 minutes
- In 2009, 1.4 million people were arrested for driving under the influence. This is less than 1% of the amount self reported by adults. (147 million self reported episodes of drunk driving)
- An average drunk driver will drive drunk 87 times before being pulled over
- Alcohol-related crashes in the United States cost the public an estimated \$114.3 billion in 2000, including \$51.1 billion in monetary costs and an estimated \$63.2 billion in quality of life losses. People other than the drinking driver paid \$71.6 billion of the alcohol-related crash bill, which is 63 percent of the total cost of these crashes
- In 2001, more than half a million people were injured in crashes where police reported that alcohol was present — an average of one person injured every minute

The danger presented by DWI was clearly illustrated by the remarks of one of the graduates who spoke about her offense. She was driving drunk in her father’s truck on

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Interstate 44 when she struck a tractor trailer and her truck burst into flames. Rather than stop, in her drunken state she accelerated away from the crash in the flaming truck up an exit ramp where she then struck yet another tractor trailer. She reminded current DWI Court participants to remember when it gets hard or they are sitting in jail for a sanction that they do have a choice and they can always choose to go to prison. Fortunately, having completed the rigors of DWI Court, she reenters our community sober and with the skills to remain so. That is something a prison sentence would not have accomplished.

Available statistics indicate that DWI Court prevents recidivism 90% of the time. While for some offenders incarceration is the only sentence appropriate to protect our community and hold the offender accountable, DWI Court presents our greatest opportunity to hold most of these offenders accountable for their actions while also giving them the tools necessary to be self-disciplined and personally responsible not to drink and drive again.

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