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Hometown Focus

DRUG COURT GRADUATE - Cont. from page 8

What happened to Leonna? You will have to read through the rest of the article and then you will know how this drug addict resolved her conflicts in life and where she stands today with her drug problems.

The follow up part of this article was to interview the people who implement the program at the ground level. The first connection to the program is Rachelle Beasley, the Pulaski County Circuit Clerk. I asked Mrs. Beasley what the initial intake was for someone wanting to get into the Drug Court program. She replied that a Risk and Means Assessment had to be conducted.

The assessment consists of 19 questions on a form which allows a group of personnel associated with the court to decide if the person meets the criteria. The group consists of Prosecuting Attorney Kevin Hillman, Judge Colin Long, officers of the court called trackers, Administrative Treatment Provider, Probation and Parole, and the Circuit Clerk.

Mrs. Beasley said recommendations are also received from family, police officers, and defense attorneys. One of the underlying criteria is that the person has to have been charged with a felony or felonies and must be represented by an attorney. Normally, attorney Deborah Hooper represents most of the applicants for (Pro Bono) free. If she is not available, other attorneys in the area provide the service.

The next step is the person must enter a plea and be sentenced by a judge.

The basic requirements that have to be validated before the entry of the person into the program is:

1. The person must have stable housing.
 2. They must be in school or working.
 3. Submit to a random urinalysis.
 4. And abide to a 9 p.m. curfew.
- The program consists of five phases and they are:
- Phase 1 consists of 60 days of successful completion
 - Phase 2 consists of 90 days of successful completion
 - Phase 3 consists of 90 days of successful completion
 - Phase 4 consists of 90 days of successful completion
 - Phase 5 is 120 days of successful completion

successful completion
 The individual has to participate in individual and group counseling and if the person fails to meet the mandate of one of the phases there are penalties which are outlined in a rule book which is given to each person in the program. The program consists of a minimum of 15 months and the person must achieve the following tasks at the end of the program for the court:

- Attain a GED
- Stable home
- Be employed
- Clean of narcotics for 90 days

The person is then under the supervision of Probation and Parole for at least 6 months. The program itself has been in existence for a total of ten years and was started by Judge Colin Long when he saw the impact of drugs on the court system.

There are currently 47 graduates of the 184 persons attempting the program over the 10-year period, four passed away during the trial period and one absconded. In some of the statistics, there is a mingling of Veterans Court members too who have addiction problems. The Veterans Court Program has a total of 37 entries over the 10-year period too and there was six re-offenders.

In a total number of those assigned to operate the program, there are ten people. The funding to operate the process is from State and Federal grants.

The next person who was interviewed for this article was Kevin Hillman, the Prosecuting Attorney for Pulaski County. Mr. Hillman said those people who are usually referred through his office are offenders who have failed probation of which three fourths fit into that category. Other methods of referral is through defense attorneys and some family members or friends of the offender.

I asked Mr. Hillman what changes if any, have had an impact on the selection process from the different drugs appearing on the community landscape. He said drug charges don't carry the weight that they used to as our society decriminalizes some of the drugs through legislation such as marijuana.

Mr. Hillman said it is a lot cheaper for the community to support a drug court than it is to have a person go through the court system then be incarcerated in prison.

I asked Mr. Hillman if he could provide the costs of the drug program for an offender as opposed to that of cost for court and prison. Mr. Hillman provided the information from his most current report which gives the cost of drug court at seven thousand dollars as opposed to approximately twenty two thousand for incarceration in prison. Mr. Hillman said this is a great savings to the public and gives people a chance to restart their lives over again.

Mr. Hillman said; what is missing in life for a lot of the offenders who come through the program is accountability for their actions. The program helps to teach them responsibility and gives them structure to their daily routines. Mr. Hillman said he and his office have to sign off on each person submitted for the program before the request can go forward. He said he has to file a motion on sanctions and issue a warrant for those who fail to complete the actions required of them.

I asked Mr. Hillman if sometimes the persons in the program still have the responsibility to pay court fines and repay people who the offender stole from, or damaged property, etc. Was all of that discounted because they entered the program? Mr. Hillman said the person was still responsible to pay the fines and restitution for the thefts or damages. Hillman did however, say costs might be waved or adjudicated to a lesser amount depending on the person's effort and status. I asked Mr. Hillman if there were one thing he could change in the program, what would it be? He said, "I would get people in the program sooner!" I asked Mr. Hillman if it would be possible for the Public Defender's office to lend support for the program and he said the Public Defender's office has declined to participate.

I asked Hillman if certain types of drugs elongated the program or could acutely cause the offender to either stumble or fail the program? Mr. Hillman said most of the persons in the program were addicted to Heroin (45%) Meth (45%) and (10%) other drugs. He went on to say that Heroin is more difficult to come off of and sometimes requires a maintenance program. He also said that the program had lost two participants to overdoses.

I asked Mr. Hillman if he personally attended each of the reviews and he said he did except, when he was out of the office on other business. He went on to say he felt it was so important that it required his input. Mr. Hillman said as the prisons continue to fill at a rapid rate and there is a reduced number of spaces for inmates, "We have to come up with different measures to address the drug issues!"

Former Pulaski County Sheriff Ron Long provided the most up to date data on the Federal legislative bills for narcotics intervention. They are as follows for the FY 2019 DOD/LHSED Minibus - The bill included over 6.7 billion to address substance use and mental health, including opioid and heroin abuse, which is \$228 million above the 2018 enacted level. The breakdown on these amounts are as follows:

- 1.5 billion in state opioid response grants
 - 475 million for CDC opioid prevention and surveillance
 - 120 million for the Rural Communities opioids Response Program
 - 70 million for drug courts
- FY 2020 Appropriations-H.R. 1865 Further consolidated Appropriations A

Finally, back to Leonna and where she stands in the rehabilitation of her life. I asked her if she looked at life differently or felt different after being off drugs. She said it was hard for her to make all of the mandated meetings and she had wanted to quit. She went on to say she even had a mini melt down and thought about quitting in the first phase but that passed and she began to adjust her lifestyle.

In phase 2 she began to feel good about herself, thus giving her more confidence and from that point on she said she did not slip at all.

Today, she is in a new relationship, has a job, goes to church on a regular basis and is involved in an addiction program. In fact, she currently chairs the Narcotics Anonymous for a 4-5 county area surrounding Pulaski County. There are currently 6-8 members and she said they are working to bring oth-



Pulaski County Circuit Clerk Rachelle Beasley. Submitted

ers into the program.
 I asked her what her last thought was on narcotics. She said "The path you are on will take you to prison or the grave." She went on to say she fields calls from current addicts and she works hard to refer them to someone within the NA program who can relate and help them kick their addiction.

Today, Leonna is a picture of health and has a bright shining smile. She is quick to laugh, something that just a few years ago did not seem possible. Drugs have always been in the Pulaski County area and can be obtained if you choose that path. Leonna hopes

you will choose another path and she said if this article saves just one person, she is glad she stepped forward into the light and let you see who an addict is.

This program is worthwhile and Judge Long is to be commended for his efforts to be a trail blazer in helping to restructure people's lives and give them that second chance. It is more than cost effective and deserves to be expanded as the landscape of narcotics changes.

For those interested in inquiring about drug court, you can contact Rachelle Beasley at her office number, 573-774-4755. Wanda

Coffman is taking all calls for Narcotics Anonymous at 573-512-1784.

As a last note, there are a lot more people involved in this program than just the ones highlighted in the article, they too are to be commended on their part to maintain and promote such a worthy program.

Editor's Note: I want to express my sincere gratitude to Leonna Coffman for her brave honesty about her struggles and for her heart to help others. Thank you also to all those who make Drug Court possible! You are making a difference! - C.E.

Learning to say Good-bye in the era of coronavirus



Submitted by Cindy Payne

So what are we to do when a beloved friend, father, grandfather, and Christian Church elder passes away in the midst of a worldwide pandemic prevents the hugs and eulogies and farewells we would normally offer his family and each other?

Well, the people of Crocker had an answer for that question on Sunday, March 22, when Don Brown, 83, was given an impromptu sendoff that no one could have expected or planned better. It was Penny Peterson's idea.

"When we found out that the family was having a private funeral due to the Coronavirus restrictions on large gatherings," Penny said, "I thought of a way to show our love and respect for Don."

Word was sent out by text and word of mouth asking friends to create a car procession along the road from the funeral home to the cemetery. They were told to pull over wherever they could find a



The people of Crocker created a car procession along the road from the funeral home to the cemetery Sunday, March 22 to honor Don Brown. Due to the Coronavirus restrictions on large gatherings, the Brown family had a private funeral, and the people of Crocker then found a way to say their farewells. Submitted

spot, park, turn flashers on and just wait for the hearse and family to pass by.

And that's what they did. Only they didn't just park and wait. They got out of their cars and stood quietly to show their love and respect for their friend and his family in a way that brought tears and some closure.

"Inside the funeral home, it felt lonely and so sad," Joe Brown, son of the deceased, said. "But when we came out and saw this wave of people standing by their cars, we were touched. We will

never forget it."

Penny will always remember it too.

"We've been friends with Don for 30 or 40 years," she said. It made her happy that a little thing like a pandemic couldn't stop people from honoring his passing.

At the cemetery, Joe looked over and saw Penny's son Kenny, a gravedigger, standing by the grave. Kenny was like one of Don Brown's own family.

"I knew when I saw him," Joe said, "that my dad was in good hands."



Leonna Coffman, Drug Court graduate. Submitted

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