



## Supreme Court of Florida

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### **Chief Justice Addresses 10th Annual Statewide Drug Court Graduation As Florida Celebrates 20th Anniversary of Creation of Nation's 1st Drug Court**

TALLAHASSEE – Since the first drug court in the country was created in Miami 20 years ago, tens of thousands of Floridians have graduated from drug courts all around the state, saving lives, healing families and strengthening communities. Their courage and tenacity will be celebrated when Florida marks the 20th anniversary of drug courts during the 10th Annual Statewide Drug Court Graduation on **Friday, May 15th, at 9:30 a.m. in Miami.**

Florida Chief Justice Peggy A. Quince will address the newest graduates -- 265 people in 33 different drug courts from the Panhandle to the Keys. Prior to the graduation ceremony, the National Association of Drug Court Professionals will hold a press conference in front of the Miami-Dade Courthouse, 73 West Flagler Street. The press conference will begin at 8 a.m. The 10th Annual Statewide Graduation is part of Florida's celebration of National Drug Court Month and May 15th is National Drug Court Commencement Day.

The statewide graduation, which is being hosted by the 11th Judicial Circuit, will be webcast at <http://www.miamidade.gov/webcast/05152009NADCP-webcast.htm>. After the statewide graduation, the 33 drug courts will continue with local graduations. The participating drug courts are in Escambia, Okaloosa, Leon, Marion, Baker, Sarasota, Manatee, Hillsborough, Bay, Palm Beach, Monroe, Broward, Brevard and Miami-Dade Counties.

Florida was the pioneer in the development of treatment-based drug courts, which provide non-violent drug-related offenders with intensive treatment and judicial supervision in lieu of incarceration. Twenty years after the first drug court was created in Miami, drug courts continue to demonstrate their effectiveness through significant reductions in recidivism. They also have proven to reunify families and restore justice within the community. There are more than 2,300 drug courts across the country.

In Florida, more than 25,600 people have graduated from a drug court in just the last five years. Florida currently has 108 drug courts within the state's 20 judicial circuits representing 46 of its 67 counties. Florida also has several different kinds of drug courts: pre-trial diversion drug courts for first-time adult offenders, post-adjudicatory drug courts for non-violent offenders with

prior convictions, juvenile drug courts, re-entry drug courts, DUI drug courts, family dependency drug courts and misdemeanor drug courts.

Just this spring the Florida Legislature's Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability reported that drug-addicted offenders who successfully complete post-adjudicatory drug courts in Florida were 80 percent less likely to go to prison over a three-year period than the matched comparison group.

The remarkable success of drug courts can be measured in statistics – and also in the stories of people whose lives were transformed. People like Gadsden County Sheriff's Deputy Thomas Henry, who graduated from drug court in 1998, and Bobby Robinson and Linda Walker, who graduated from drug court in 2000. Or Elyse Dermer, who graduated from a drug court in 2006, and Lindsay Peters and Jeff Jones, who graduated last year.

---Ms. Dermer, 46, describes her addiction as a living nightmare. And it wasn't until she was arrested, incarcerated and ordered by the court into treatment that she was able to wake up. She graduated from drug court three years ago and is now an exemplary and enthusiastic employee at the **Miami** residential treatment program where she was able to recover. She believes her greatest accomplishment has been healing her relationships with her three sons and other family members.

---Deputy Henry, 26, often says that drug court was the best thing that ever happened to him. He was 16 when he was arrested for possession of marijuana less than 20 grams and paraphernalia. He entered the juvenile drug court program in **Leon County** in February 1998. While in the program, he decided to turn his life around and graduated successfully from drug court and high school. He went on to train as a police officer and has been a deputy with the Gadsden County Sheriff's Department since 2002. He speaks to the teenagers now in drug court about choices and consequences.

---Mr. Robinson, 57, graduated from Felony Drug Court in **Broward County** in March 2000 following an arrest for possession of cocaine. When he went to drug court, his record included a college degree, honorable discharge from the military and several prison stays. Six years later, he added something else to his record: recognition by former Gov. Jeb Bush as one of 13 drug court alumni honored for outstanding contributions and service to the recovery community in Florida. Mr. Robinson, who was recently certified as a recovery support specialist, is currently working to become certified as an addiction counselor. He works for the Broward Outreach Center, providing services for people who are homeless and addicted. He also brings recovery services to the Felony Drug Court as well as into the jail and to the homeless.

---Ms. Walker, 44, gives back to her community in many different ways. "Have you talked to Linda Walker?" is frequently heard when organizations tackling drug abuse in **Hillsborough County** find themselves with a question or a problem related to housing and other community resources. A former cocaine addict, Ms. Walker graduated from the Adult Post-Adjudication Drug Court in the 13th Judicial Circuit in May 2000. For the last six years, she has been the house manager and program manager at a woman's recovery house and a member of the Hillsborough County Homeless Coalition.

---Ms. Peters, 20, began using alcohol and marijuana when she was 15. By the time she was 16, she had moved on to cocaine and Xanax – daily. She was referred to drug court in **Palm Beach County** and began outpatient treatment but was arrested for the second time on another felony drug charge less than two weeks later. She was put in a residential program but was discharged a few weeks later because she refused to follow the rules. Next came several weeks in jail, which Ms. Peters calls the best thing that could have happened. In jail, she promised herself she would finish treatment if she was given another chance. She was – and she did, in March 2008.

---Mr. Jones, 45, graduated from drug court in **Leon County** last year. His substance abuse began 33 years earlier, when he was a 12-year-old boy who gave into peer pressure to try marijuana. With the exception of just a few “clean” months, his substance abuse continued over the next three decades. He abused alcohol, pills and cocaine as well as marijuana but managed to function well enough to work and pay his bills. Finally in November 2006, he was arrested, which he now believes was the best thing that could have ever happened to him. After he was released, he seriously considered killing himself but instead called Narcotics Anonymous. He was accepted into drug court and graduated in January 2008. He is active in NA and works to get meetings into the Leon County Jail. He has also resumed relationships with family members he hasn't talked to in years. He describes himself as “a grateful recovering addict.”

The 10th Annual Statewide Drug Court Graduation will begin at **9:30 a.m. ET on Friday May 15 in the Miami-Dade County Commission Chambers, 111 NW 1st Street.**

Senior Judge Jeffrey Rosinek and Circuit Judge Deborah White-Labora will preside. In addition to Florida Chief Justice Quince, speakers include retired Gen. Barry McCaffrey, former director of the National Office of Drug Control Policy, and Bill Janes, director of the Florida Office of Drug Control.

For more information on Florida drug courts, go to:  
[http://www.flcourts.org/gen\\_public/family/drug\\_court/index.shtml](http://www.flcourts.org/gen_public/family/drug_court/index.shtml)

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