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For immediate release



Several members of the Rice County Treatment Court Team, participants past and present and their family members gathered earlier this month for a celebration of National Treatment Court Month. (Rice County photo)

Treatment court program ‘transformative,’ say judge, county attorney

Change is never easy. It takes commitment, courage and time. And when it happens for participants in Rice County’s Treatment Court, it’s “transformative,” says District Court Judge Jeffrey Johnson.

Johnson, who’s led the Rice County Treatment Court program since not long after being sworn in as a District Court judge in early 2018, was previously involved with the Steele-Waseca Treatment Court while working in the Public Defender’s Office, so, he’s seen what it takes to make Treatment Court successful, both from participants and from those who make up the court’s team – social workers, mental health professionals, prosecutors, defense attorneys law enforcement and probations officials.

Team members’ hard work and dedication cannot be overstated, Johnson told the Board of Commissioners during its May 9 discussion of a proclamation marking May as National Treatment Court Month. Many of them provide in-kind services.

“It save lives,” he said of the program. “It’s amazing to watch people transform.”

Next year, Rice County Treatment Court celebrates its 10-year anniversary

The program, sanctioned by the Minnesota Judicial Branch, lasts anywhere from 18 months on up, and serves non-violent participants who have committed a drug offense or one motivated by substance abuse. Participants are required to attend regular meetings, and submit to long-term treatment, intensive court monitoring and strict community supervision, all with the goal of keeping them from repeating behaviors that brought them to court.

“Treatment courts are the single most successful intervention in our nation’s history for leading people living with substance use and mental health disorders out of the justice system and into lives of recovery and stability,” according to the state Judicial Branch. “They improve education, employment, housing and financial stability; and promote family reunification. Instead of viewing addiction as a moral failing, they

view it as a disease. Instead of punishment, they offer treatment. Instead of indifference, they show compassion.”

Since 2014, 35 individuals have graduated from the Rice County program. In the last year, the program has grown, and currently has a more robust enrollment.

More recently, Judge Karie Anderson joined the court, which has provided leadership for female participants. Female participants’ needs and concerns can vary from their male counterparts, providing female leadership can be critical to their success. Like Johnson, Anderson was a member of the Steele Waseca Treatment Court Team before being appointed to the bench.

But it was the success stories that Johnson, County Attorney Brian Mortenson and Community Corrections Manager Angela Brewer focused on when speaking to the board.

Both Johnson and Mortenson shared their sense of pride in watching participants quite literally change as the weeks and months pass.

“It’s not easy,” said Mortenson. It’s the most intensive program you could do.”

Brewer, whose unit includes the Treatment Court, emphasized the importance of what’s taking place in the program.

“(Treatment Court) has such a far-reaching effect, well beyond what we can capture in statistics ... and success rates in our program,” she said.

“This work matters not only in the lives of the participants in our program, but to their families and friends and loved ones who care about them and would like to see them sober and stable and healthy in the community.”



Judge Jeffrey Johnson talks about his experience with the Rice County Treatment Court during the May 9 Board of Commissioners meeting. Also pictured are, from left, Behavioral Health Services Supervisor Dante Hummel-Langerfeld, County Attorney Brian Mortenson and Community Corrections Manager Angela Brewer. (Rice County photo)

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