

County drug court honors new graduates

By Eric Kopp
Okeechobee News

"I was driving around Okeechobee like a maniac. All I could think about was getting my next hit of crack cocaine."

That recollection came from Kevin Cameron who was among nine other adults who graduated from drug court Wednesday, April 29. By successfully completing the program, all charges against the participants have been dropped.

"If not for drug court, I would have been dead by now," he told the audience and County Judge Jerald Bryant.

This graduation was a first, of sorts, for the program. While five similar graduation ceremonies had previously been held in his courtroom, Judge Bryant said this was the first time that those charged with felonies were included. The prior graduates were all charged with misdemeanors.

One of those was Mr. Cameron, who was arrested in 2007 on felony charges of tampering with

physical evidence, possession of cocaine and the purchase of cocaine. Now, he's not only free of those charges but he's free from the life-threatening hold cocaine had on his life.

For Edward Louth, marijuana was his drug of choice. And, like Mr. Cameron, because of drug court and the help of everyone associated with that program he can now look in the mirror and be proud of the man looking back at him.

"Now I know the wrong effect I had on my family and friends," he said as he fought to control his emotions. "Now, I'm happier in my life."

Not long after Judge Bryant took office, he instituted the drug court program to give some drug offenders a chance at a new life. And when he looked down from his bench Wednesday morning at the 10 people standing before him, Judge Bryant wore a smile of pride for what these people had accomplished.



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Ten people graduated from the drug court program Wednesday, April 29, and were honored for their achievement by members of the drug court team. Taking part in the ceremonies were: (front, left to right) team member Viki Lamberti, graduate Emily C., team member Becky Gray and graduate Edward Louth; (back, left to right) graduate Michael E., team member Steve Condit, graduate Kevin Cameron, team member Bill McNiff and Judge Jerald Bryant.

"Except for adoption cases, this is one of the most fulfilling court