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## Rice County to Open Drug Court on July 3

***For immediate release***

FARIBAULT, Minn. (June 30, 2014) – After more than a year of planning, the district court in Rice County will soon join a growing list of Minnesota counties offering a specialized “drug court” to deal with alcohol and other drug-addicted offenders in the judicial system. The Rice County Drug Court will meet for the first time on Thursday, July 3, after receiving final approval from the Minnesota Judicial Council last week.

“Our hope is that the Rice County Drug Court will keep high-risk and high-need drug offenders out of prison and successful in treatment,” said Rice County District Court Judge Thomas M. Neville, who will serve as lead judge for the Rice County Drug Court. “We will hold participants accountable and will monitor them closely for compliance with our rules. The goal is to make our communities safer, at a lower cost to taxpayers, and to support families of drug-addicted offenders.”

Drug courts are specialized, problem-solving court programs that target non-violent criminal offenders who suffer from addiction and/or mental illness. The Rice County Drug Court will provide and enforce a treatment program that prioritizes sobriety and recovery for the offender. Participants will receive ongoing treatment, frequent drug testing, and regular mandatory check-in court appearances. The program uses a range of immediate sanctions and incentives to foster behavior change.

The Rice County Drug Court will admit adults who are deemed to be high-risk and high-need offenders, who are facing either a presumptive prison sentence or a mandatory minimum of six months in the Rice County Jail. In order to qualify for drug court in Rice County, participants must also be parents of minor children. Violent offenders will not be eligible, nor will first-time fifth-degree drug offenders or DWI offenders.

Rice County officials began planning for the Rice County Drug Court in 2013, and the county was one of 10 counties nationally that was selected for drug court training by the U.S. Department of Justice in that year. The Rice County Drug Court will involve collaboration between the Rice County District Court and several Rice County offices, including the County Attorney, the County Sheriff, Community Corrections, and Social Services. In addition, the program will engage with the local Public Defender’s Office, the police departments in Faribault and Northfield, regional treatment providers, and the Rice County Family Services Collaborative.

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“There is strong support for the creation of a drug court in Rice County from both criminal justice and treatment professionals,” said Judge Neuville. “I’ve been very pleased with our planning and development of guidelines to date. We are anxious to begin.”

Rice County Drug Court is one of six new drug courts in the state that will open their doors this summer, after the Legislature provided new funding for drug courts during the 2013 Legislative Session. With the opening of these new courts, Minnesota will have 44 drug courts that will eventually serve 56 counties in the state. The Minnesota Judicial Branch’s Drug Court Initiative Advisory Committee has a set a goal to make drug court services available statewide.

A [2012 statewide evaluation](#) that compared over 500 drug court participants to nearly 650 offenders with similar profiles who did not enter a drug court program showed that drug court participants:

- Had lower recidivism rates over two-and-a-half years – 17% versus 32% reconviction rate;
- Spent fewer days incarcerated, saving the state on average \$3,200 per participant over two and a half years; and
- Showed gains in employment, educational achievement, home rental or ownership, and payment of child support over the run of the program.

“The Rice County Drug Court model will support offenders in their recovery and aid in successful outcomes for participants, their families, and the community,” said Yvette Marthalar, the Rice County Drug Court Coordinator. “Our program has a very strong foundation because of the ongoing collaboration between county agencies, court services, and community organizations.”

### ***About the Minnesota Judiciary***

The Minnesota Judicial Branch is made up of 10 judicial districts with 289 district court judgeships, 19 Court of Appeals judges, and seven Supreme Court justices. The Judicial Branch is governed by the Judicial Council, which is chaired by Lorie S. Gildea, Chief Justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court. The Minnesota Judicial Branch is mandated by the Minnesota Constitution to resolve disputes promptly and without delay. In 2013, there were more than 1.4 million cases filed in district courts in Minnesota. For more information please visit [www.mncourts.gov](http://www.mncourts.gov).

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