

Letters to the Editor: Recidivism Rate Much Lower in Drug Court

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Recidivism Rate Much Lower in Drug Court

To the editor:

I am writing this letter to clarify some misunderstandings and hopefully allay some fears regarding the operation of Lewis County Drug Court. In a letter to the editor published July 28, Gerald O. Lord made the statement, "I am not sure of the numbers but I am sure the recidivism rate is quite high."

In fact, the recidivism rate for the Lewis County adult felony offender program is 11 percent. In comparison, the recidivism rate for a drug addicted felony offender not treated by drug court continues to hover above 65 percent.

What cannot be captured by statistics is the societal impact of the program. The biggest impact is on the children. Almost everyone in drug court is a parent, and those that haven't yet started a family, soon will. Healing a drug addicted parent stops the multi-generational cycle of poverty, abuse and neglect.

Local drug courts are the true exemplification of a community "taking care of one's own." We only accept people into the program who reside in Lewis County. The vast majority of our 96 graduates were born and raised in Lewis County and the vast majority of them continue to live here today.

Lord is correct when he identifies the pressures individuals face from their peer groups. What is unique about a drug court program is that people learn to live sober, functional lives in their home town.

Rather than sending someone away to prison with the expectation (rarely realized) they return rehabilitated, Drug Court teaches individuals how to avoid the temptations, hold down a job, parent their children and become functional members of society.

Lord is correct when he states that the "jailer, prosecutor, among others" are paid from the sales tax funding. However, what Lord doesn't appreciate is that the judge, the prosecutor and the compliance officer are essential members of the treatment team.

Nationwide, these are recognized as key components in Drug Court and you can't run the program without them. The funds received by Superior Court, the sheriff's department and the prosecuting attorney's office goes directly to the program and not to inflated administrative costs.

Untreated mental illness and addiction are devastating for the individual and the community. This letter is not an endorsement for any particular candidate.

However, I want to commend the Board of County Commissioners for taking action. The board recognized when everyone chips in (\$1 for every \$1,000 spent) those most vulnerable among us can find healing and wellness, making for a healthier and safer Lewis County for everyone.

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