



## U.S. Representative Oberstar Hears About Success of DWI/Drug Court

By Laurel Beager, Editor

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A court's success in saving lives and saving money in Koochiching County has helped garner more funding and a visit by the official that helped get the money.

U.S. Rep. Jim Oberstar met with graduates, team members and court officials involved in the county's DWI/Substance Abuse Court last week.

The court recently received \$100,000 from an appropriations bill, and earlier, Oberstar helped the court gain more than \$300,000 from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

The congressman explained that \$850,000 in the last two years has been saved in jail costs avoided in Koochiching County.

“And the benefit of human beings restored to dignity and understanding their self worth and helping

other people — it's fabulous. So uplifting,” said Oberstar.

Four of the 64 graduates of the program, which began in January 2005, discussed the role it has played in getting their lives back on track.

Joe Farmer, Staci Bannert, Richard Baron, and Mickey Brackin each told Oberstar about how the team, Judge Chad LeDuc and probation staff worked together to help them overcome their substance abuse and become productive members of the community.



Logo for Koochiching County, Minnesota

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## Chief Justice Price Calls for Expansion of DWI Courts in Missouri

On February 3, 2010, Missouri's Chief Justice Ray Price delivered the annual 'State of the Judiciary' Address during a joint session of the General Assembly in Jefferson City, Mo. Justice Price, who Chairs the National Association of Drug Court Professionals Board of Directors, spoke eloquently about the need for smarter

sentencing of addicted offenders including expansion of Drug Courts and DWI Courts.

“We have had tremendous success with DWI courts,” said Justice Price, “They operate on the same model as our drug courts....Our goal should not be to spend \$16,000 a year to keep



Justice Price at the NADCP Annual Conference

these offenders in jail as long as we can. Our goal should be to spend \$3,000 a year to treat their alcoholism, and to return them to our state as productive tax-paying members of society who drive with licenses, with insurance, and who are sober.”

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The program takes a holistic approach to helping clients by addressing issues relating to their social needs and skills, health, employment, housing, and spirituality. The team is made up of representatives of the police, treatment counselors, jailers, defense counsel, social services, victims services, physicians and others.

DWI courts and their success have faced skepticism, said Della Warren, coordinator of DWI court here and in Lake of the Woods County. But Koochiching's DWI court has just a 5-percent recidivism rate among its graduates and has a graduation rate of 97 percent. Traditional probation sees 60 percent to 70 percent recidivism, she said.

Farmer fought back tears as he told Oberstar of his involvement in the program. "My life is 100 times different

— better," he said. "I am home with my kids being a father and a provider. I am there, out of jail."

Members of the team made the program personal, he said. "These people tell me they believe in me. That they're proud of me," he said.

LeDuc said the graduates serve as an inspiration.

"We've given them a little push, but they've turned their lives around," he said of the graduates.

Some of that push comes in the form of the Viva E Urinalyses machine that helps determine whether clients in the program are using drugs.

Warren explained that it provides instant, reliable results. "It allows for immediate sanctions if there is drug use," she said.

**"And the benefit of human beings restored to dignity and understanding their self worth and helping other people — it's fabulous. So uplifting," said Oberstar.**

Just like in good parenting, Warren said penalties are most effective when doled out immediately after the infraction. In addition, she said the urinalysis takes the pressure off clients in the program because they know they can't use without getting caught.

"We've had a few surprises, in a good way, and some of us call them miracles," said Warren. "We never thought some families or individuals would ever, ever turn to sobriety."

Warren marveled that Farmer is actually recruiting for the program, bringing people he knows with abuse issues into the program.

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## DWI Courts in the News

As DWI Courts continue to gain momentum throughout the country, the NCDC is making media outreach a priority. There are a growing number of local stories praising the work being done by their local DWI Court. Here are a couple of examples.

### DUIs in Drug Court

**CANYON COUNTY, IDAHO** — Only a year ago, if a defendant pleaded guilty to a felony DUI in Canyon County, he essentially had two options: prison or probation. Prison provides punishment, but does it offer sufficient treatment for rehabilitation? Probation provides a certain level of treatment, but with overwhelming caseloads, could offenders get lost in the shuffle, or get away with continued substance abuse?

On Jan. 12, 2009, Canyon County Prosecutor John Bujak decided that felony DUI offenders should be given another option: DWI Court. Though once a skeptic of the alternative, community treatment-based program, Bujak said data shows the program brings good and lasting change for offenders and society. [READ MORE.](#)

### DWI/Drug Court Gives Offenders a New Opportunity

**CARLSBAD, NEW MEXICO** — The 322nd graduate got a second chance at the Carlsbad Magistrate Court DWI program graduation Wednesday evening.

"You made a mistake in life, you're here to learn from that," Magistrate Judge Henry Castaneda said at the ceremony. "Make your changes now."

The DWI Drug Court program is a rigorous compilation of classes, programs, counseling, screenings, support groups, monitoring and reporting.

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Brackin told Oberstar she's been sober for 4 1/2 years and graduated from the program three years ago

"I did time in jail, treatment and a halfway house," she said. "Then I had to come back home, which scared me."

And while she explained that she learned the tools of sobriety through treatment, she didn't know how to employ them "in this big bad world. I didn't know what normal was."

Brackin said having the team's support and their pride "is huge." Now, Brackin is a chemical dependency technician at a treatment center and is working toward getting her practical nurse licensure back.

"I just keep setting goals," she said.

In most cases, clients are sent to DWI/Drug court in an effort to avoid long jail terms and high fines. That wasn't the case with Brackin.

"She didn't have to come to the program," LeDuc noted. "She wanted to."

Probation Officer Troy Rautio told Oberstar that he taught Brackin how to tie fishing lures onto line to give her a hobby that doesn't involve illegal substances.

"She's done a wonderful job," he said of her life after the program.

For Staci Bannert, "not getting high was the easy part; they're drug testing all the time. The hard part for me was everything else. I was desperate to be happy."

Bannert's voice broke with emotion as she

explained that she began using methamphetamine on a daily basis at age 12 or 13.

Because of that abuse, she said she didn't learn social skills that allowed her to easily talk to people and handle her emotions.

"I didn't know anything about real life," she said. "People in Drug Court gave me the tools to do those things. Now, life is perfect."

She told Oberstar she's grateful for much, including a son, who has "never had to see me messed up." She's attending college, working as a public health nurse and purchased a house.

"I'm grateful for the opportunity to give back," she said. "I know I would never be here without Drug Court — ever."

Baron left International Falls to live in Washington state, where he said he "bottomed out" in substance abuse. Despite his objections, family members brought him back to Borderland where

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**"I don't know the cost to run DWI court, but what it's done for me is priceless," Baron told Oberstar, encouraging his support for future funding. "It's an investment in society and the returns are huge."**

## Chief Justice Price Calls for Expansion of DWI Courts in Missouri

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Missouri is home to 44 DWI and hybrid Drug/DWI Courts and plays a national role in training DWI Courts as part of the National Center for DWI Courts Mentor Court program.

"I applaud Chief Justice Price on his call to action on behalf of Missouri's excellent DWI Courts," said NCDC Director David Wallace. "One of the reasons for the widespread success of DWI Courts in Missouri has been the tremendous support from the

**"Expansion of DWI Courts statewide, and the return of licenses to sober DWI Court graduates, will do more for the safety of our roads and highways than any other single change in the law you can make."**

- Missouri Chief Justice Ray Price

Missouri Judiciary and Chief Justice Ray Price."

Chief Justice Price's speech struck a chord with local media and was widely covered throughout Missouri. *The Kansas City Star* lauded the speech in an editorial, writing "Missourians deserve judges who act with integrity. With Price's address, they also got bold and thoughtful advice."



# NCDC

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## Saint Patrick's Day Impaired Driving Prevention Campaign Planner March 9 - 17, 2010

NHTSA has once again developed a "Campaign Planner" to help get the message out about impaired driving during St. Patrick's Day. The intent of this safety planner is to provide marketing material, earned media tools, and marketing ideas that can be distributed to fit the local needs and objectives while, at the same time, partnering with other States, communities, and safety organizations on this program.

It includes messaging, templates, and banners that may be used to support the impaired driving initiatives surrounding St. Patrick's Day. The material available can be used in several capacities and all carry the tagline, "Designate a Sober Driver this St. Patrick's Day" to reinforce the *Buzzed Driving is Drunk Driving* message platform. To get the free material click [here](#).



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he learned about small town values and caring for one another.

"People didn't look at me like I felt: a loser," he told Oberstar. "They were willing to spend the time and funds to make me a part of the community. Coming back here saved my life."

Baron said he's been clean for two years and wants to pay the community back.

"I don't know the cost to run DWI court, but what it's done for me is priceless," he told Oberstar, encouraging his support for future funding. "It's an investment in society and the returns are huge."

The visit by Oberstar was important, Warren said. "It validated all the hard work they have been doing," she said of the graduates and team. "They got to

show that his support is crucial, because it keeps us going."

Funding the DWI/Drug court program will be an ongoing concern, said Warren.

"In the next biennium we will have to do a lot of leg work and education to make sure our state legislators know we are a valuable service and need to be funded somehow."

LeDuc said the program is a great community benefit and deserves to continue.

"When we were confronted with a budget crisis two years ago, and then when it just keeps getting worse year after year, reliance on state funding is non-existent," LeDuc said.

**Hotsheet Editor's Note:** *This is a great example of a DWI Court working with the community and community leaders to ensure continued support. If you are a DWI Court and you have not encouraged your community leaders to learn more about your program, you are missing a critical step. Guiding Principle #5 of the 10 Guiding Principles talks specifically about forging agency, organization and community partnerships. With such a partnership you build credibility. It is that partnership that allows you to broaden the availability of resources needed to run your program. A great opportunity to raise the awareness of your program will be in April which is Alcohol Awareness Month.*

For more information on the Guiding Principles, click [here](#), or go to [www.dwicourts.org](http://www.dwicourts.org) and click on "Resources" and then click on "Publications." For information about Alcohol Awareness Month click [here](#).