

## New beginnings

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MARIETTA - Holly Andrew of Marietta, a mother of two, said she hit rock bottom in 2007, when her alcoholism was so out of control that she ended up injuring her 74-year-old father.

Andrew said her excessive drinking first became a problem during her student days at east Cobb's Walton High School in the '80s.

"I noticed I was able to drink more and more, and I noticed that I would turn to alcohol when I was stressed out. And then in my early 20s, I was introduced to drugs," she said.

As a result, she found herself in and out of jail on DUI and drug arrests for the next two decades.

During an argument with her father, in which she was drunk, she bumped into the ladder he was perched on, causing him to fall and break his leg. She was sent to jail for the incident and offered a chance to enroll in a drug court program.

Tuesday evening at Marietta First Baptist Church, Andrew was among a dozen graduates who had successfully completed Cobb

Juvenile Court Judge Juanita Stedman's Family Dependency Treatment Court.

Since Stedman formed the court in 2005, it has seen about 60 graduates. There are presently 43 mothers and 10 fathers enrolled in the program.

Stedman described how someone comes to be enrolled.

"You either lose your children through the Division of Family and Children Services based upon your drug addiction," Stedman said, or, she went on to say, the baby may be born testing positive for drugs, DFCS may have tried to work with the parent who continues to test positive on drug screenings or the parent may put the family in danger through substance abuse, to list a few scenarios.



"You have stable housing, you have a stable employment or means to support your children. If you don't have a high school education, you get a GED, and you have complied with the program. You're doing three meetings a week still. When surveillance is showing up, you're complying and having those drug screenings, and they're clean, and you've had no violations, which means you've got people in your home. Your home is clean, your home is safe. It's tough to graduate, quite honestly," Stedman said.

Stedman says she usually does two graduation ceremonies a year, one in the fall and one in the spring.

The program is far more cost efficient than locking someone away in jail, she said. In Georgia, drug courts save anywhere from \$4 million to \$8 million a year by treating offenders in the community rather than in jail.

"Now I certainly will place a mom in custody for having a positive screen, for not being compliant, but in the long run, that punitive action, while it may get their attention, it's not going to be able to give them what they need in order to be back with their families," Stedman said. "You have to look what they're going to do when they get out of jail. Their children are still going to be in foster care with the state and we're all paying for it or they're going to be with a relative."

There's also the matter of what happens when the mom returns home after being in jail.

"She hasn't changed her playmates because she's going to come right back into that same home where maybe there was a significant other who was also using," Stedman said. "So one of the roles we play is you can't be in that home with the significant other, and you've got to learn to be able to support yourself without the support of someone who's using. It's such a collaborative effort. You know, to have all of those people at the table is significant. If you're incarcerating them, the only person you've got at the table is the jail, the prosecutor, the jail."

Andrew said when she was in jail for injuring her father she realized she had to change.

"And I prayed about it. I was ready, but I was unable to do it myself. And so drug court provided the accountability," she said.

Fast-forward to Tuesday night, when she was awarded her graduation certificate from the program. Andrew beamed as she addressed the audience from the podium at Marietta First Baptist Church.

"As I stepped out this afternoon into the beautiful sunlight, I was so grateful that the fall weather was glorious for this event," Andrew said. "I couldn't help think that it's the little things that make life special, and I was so grateful that today turned out to be glorious, truly one of God's days. And I thought back to the days of drinking. I would have never stopped to appreciate something so beautiful. It's the little things. I've learned to appreciate the little things. So it is with great gratitude that I stand here tonight."

Stedman said in the five years that she's overseen graduations from the

family drug court, the mothers who have graduated have not reoffended.

"None of those mothers have lost their children again because of being rearrested, and none of those mothers who have completed the program have lost their children because their children were found to be deprived. That's an amazing statistic. And that statistic doesn't happen in a vacuum," Stedman said, recognizing supporters of the program such as Marietta attorney Justin O'Dell, Johnnie Gabriel, state Rep. Judy Manning and others in attendance.

"It's just the greatest thing any judge can do to truly be part of these families," Stedman said. "To be able to watch those families come back together and function as a family - there is nothing more amazing for a judge cause usually we're in a punitive role. Usually we're punishing people or we're taking their kids away or we're locking them up. This is where we get to really play a part in helping families."

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