

HAMPTON VA

NEWS RELEASE

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Veterans drug court has its first graduate

Sept. 26, 2015 - Donald W. Lemons, Chief Justice of Virginia's Supreme Court, is expected to be one of several local and state officials on hand Tuesday, Sept. 29, when Hampton's "Veterans Track of the Hampton Drug Court" has its first graduation.

The Veteran's Court is a separate program, or track, within Hampton's larger drug treatment court. Rather than being sent to prison, those chosen for drug court receive help with their addiction - including any necessary substance abuse or mental health treatment - as well as help with housing, employment and other issues. Veterans also get help with their military benefits and have veterans as mentors.

"The program turned my life around," said Rufus Griffin, 56, the Army veteran who is scheduled to graduate Tuesday. "You can't fail unless you don't want to change," Griffin said.

Sherry Glasgow, administrator for Hampton's drug court, said Tuesday's ceremony represents a new beginning for Griffin, a commercial and residential painter. "He has finished treatment and is ready to face the world," Glasgow said.

Most people chosen for the program faced a minimum of two years in prison. They spend an average of about 18 months in the program before they graduate.

Hampton's Veteran's Track - which was the first in Virginia - got its start in 2014, when the state Supreme Court gave a \$200,000 grant to the Hampton-Newport News Community Service Board. Glasgow said the original grant was extended for a year, and they have applied for another grant.

According to the website of the Virginia Supreme Court, "undergirding drug court programs is the philosophy that more effective handling of drug treatment for addicts will result in higher recovery rates and reduced criminal behavior."

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