

First alcohol treatment court grad lauded

By Amy Wunderlin Union lifestyles editor | Posted: Thursday, October 8, 2015 9:38 am

JEFFERSON — Jefferson County's Alcohol Treatment Court recognized its first graduate, Henry Gibbemeyer, on Wednesday, Oct. 7, at the Jefferson County Courthouse.

Gibbemeyer was recognized by both Circuit Judge William Hue and Chief Justice of the Wisconsin Supreme Court Patience Roggensack, as well as a fellow treatment court peer.

Jefferson County Alcohol Treatment Court offers repeat drunk driver offenders an opportunity to break the cycle of drunk driving, improve their chances of a sober and healthy life, and contribute to a safe community. Jefferson County residents 18 years and older who have been charged with a third or greater operating while intoxicated (OWI) offense with no prior violent convictions are eligible for the program. Participation is completely voluntary.

The length of the program is determined by each participant's progress through four phases. Graduation may occur within one year, but it is likely to take additional time beyond that, depending on the participant's treatment needs.

Jefferson County Alcohol Treatment Court was created a little over a year ago to reduce the number of repeat drunk drivers in the county by allowing OWI offenders an option to participate in alcohol and other substance abuse treatment under strict judicial and community supervision. There are about 60 treatment courts throughout the state of Wisconsin.

"This treatment court holds offenders accountable for their crimes while treating and resolving alcohol issues," Hue said.

He explained that the program uses a team-based approach by involving the offender, judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, probation officers, law enforcement and treatment providers who join together in a collaborative effort.



GRADUATION CEREMONY

GRADUATION CEREMONY — Jefferson County Alcohol Treatment Court celebrated its first graduate, Henry Gibbemeyer, Wednesday afternoon at the Jefferson County Courthouse. Shown are scenes from the ceremony. Above Judge William Hue, left, congratulates Gibbemeyer. For more photos click [here](#). — Daily Union photos by Amy Wunderlin.

“We are fortunate to have many talented people joining in this effort strongly supported by the administration and county board here in Jefferson County,” Hue added.

The judge introduced Gibbemeyer by explaining the program requirements the graduate successfully has completed. Gibbemeyer has participated in 139 preliminary breath tests, 140 self-help meetings, eight random drug screens, 34 office appointments with staff and 17 court appearances. And as of Oct. 1, he has maintained 18 months of sobriety.

“Henry has also been particularly helpful to fellow participants and others, aiding and supporting their sobriety,” Hue said. “We are proud of Henry and wish him success in his day-to-day efforts in remaining sober, and we are confident that he will be law abiding and successful for the future.”

Following his introduction, Gibbemeyer took several minutes to gather his composure before emotionally explaining the impact Jefferson County Alcohol Treatment Court has had on his life.

“It’s been a very good program,” Gibbemeyer said through tears. “It’s been firm but fair from the very beginning. I’ve become a better person because of it. I’ve learned how to make the right choices and decisions. The program gave me tools to accomplish this.”

He acknowledged that the treatment court “has become the best thing that ever happened to me.”

Before the program, the graduate said he did not think the laws and rules applied to him.

“Now that I’ve gone through the ATC program, I realized that the laws and rules apply to me as well as everyone else for the safety of the general public,” Gibbemeyer said.

He said he feels healthier and more energetic after completing the project, and that other people have noticed a change in his attitude and the way he presents himself.

“My life has gotten 100 percent better,” Gibbemeyer said, noting that “Just because I’m finished with the program, though, doesn’t mean I’m finished with my sobriety.”

Following Gibbemeyer, Chief Justice Roggensack offered her congratulations. Roggensack has been a longtime supporter of treatment courts throughout the state and played an important role in their implementation.

“I am a big fan of treatment courts,” Roggensack stated. “I think they are so important and so critical, and you are very fortunate in Jefferson County to have the kind of county board you have that supports this, and believes it and understands it.”

She congratulated Gibbemeyer on his courage, which she said ultimately is the reason they were gathered to celebrate.

“We are here today to celebrate courage,” Roggensack said. “The courage of Henry Gibbemeyer to have faith in his ability to do something that some would say couldn’t be done — to give up longstanding habits that have, at times, been overwhelming and led to many bad choices.”

The chief justice went on to share a poem by Edgar Albert Guest about trying tough things, as she said “every accomplishment starts with the decision to try.”