

**SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA
COUNTY OF MARIN**



Press Release
(May 4, 2009)

**MARIN'S FAMILY VIOLENCE COURT
CELEBRATES A YEAR OF SUCCESS WITH ITS FIRST GRADUATION ON MAY 20**

A year ago, Marin's criminal justice leaders took a bold step for public safety – with no new State or County funding, they launched Marin's Family Violence Court, designed to focus the court's attention and resources on Marin's highest-risk domestic violence defendants. High-risk domestic violence defendants are those who have a history of family violence and high recidivism rates. In Marin County, family violence is the most often charged violent crime, according to the court filing data. This well known fact gave local leaders the impetus to implement the Family Violence Court. District Attorney Edward Berberian said, "I know family violence continues to be the number one violent crime in Marin. Early, meaningful and effective intervention that prevents the escalation of this violence is essential. Our Family Violence Court is a program that can meet this need and has this year demonstrated its effectiveness. I hope we can grow the program in the years to come."

The concept of the Family Violence Court is to work with defendants referred into the program after they have pled guilty to domestic violence charges. In weekly court proceedings, Family Violence Court team members intensively monitor defendants' court ordered attendance at batterers' treatment programs, as well as other therapeutic services to assist them in permanently altering behavior that leads to family violence. At the one year mark, Family Violence Court team members report that the program has achieved remarkable results; none of the participating defendants has had any re-arrests for domestic violence.

Presiding Judge Verna Adams has personally presided over Family Violence Court since its inception. She regards these outcomes as evidence of the Family Violence Court's stunning success. "The fact that not one of these high-risk defendants has re-offended in the last year is truly a remarkable achievement. I expected the outcomes of intensive monitoring to be promising; I did not expect them to be so undeniably compelling. Right now the Family Violence Court is filled to capacity, but there are many defendants who would benefit from this targeted, therapeutic approach. My hope is that we can serve a greater number of defendants in the future." That sentiment is echoed by all criminal justice departments collaborating with the Court on this program. Public Defender Joseph Spaeth said, "I wholeheartedly support and encourage restorative programs that emphasize treating individuals so that they will not re-offend and cause further harm to victims. I applaud the Family Violence Court for making treatment and close monitoring the focus of its program, and for having achieved outstanding results."

In addition to Judge Adams, Family Violence Court's core team members include Deputy Probation Officer Melissa Davis, Deputy Public Defender George Shea and Deputy District Attorney Charles Cacciatore, as well as an on-site batterers' treatment program facilitated by John Hamel, a licensed

clinical social worker, who meets with defendants directly following the adjournment of court each week. The Department of Health and Human Services also provides information and referrals to family therapeutic services and alcohol and drug treatment providers. For those defendants who demonstrate commitment and progress toward complying with the court's orders, they may elect to participate in "post graduation" services to help them reunify with their families and develop better strategies for coping with family stress.

Much of the credit for the successful defendant outcomes goes to the Probation Department, which is handling the case management of defendants to ensure their compliance with all court orders. Acting Chief Probation Officer Michael Daly said, "The Probation Department feels strongly about domestic violence in Marin. DPO Melissa Davis has done an outstanding job during the first year of Family Violence Court and has played a large part in its success. She holds offenders accountable and addresses the victim issues with equal importance."

Sustaining the Family Violence Court, given today's fiscal realities will be challenging. All criminal justice departments and the Court are faced with significant budget reductions in the coming year which will stretch resources thin. In spite of this unavoidable obstacle, Court Executive Officer Kim Turner said, "In the current difficult budget climate, Family Violence Court is not only a proven strategy to improve public and victim safety, but it also has an added benefit that is too often overlooked. By reducing recidivism in high-risk defendants, a myriad of other criminal justice costs on new arrests are successfully avoided, such as incarceration, prosecution and victim-related costs. The Family Violence Court does not just make sense as a public safety program but also gives taxpayers a great return-on-investment of their tax dollars to address a pervasive criminal justice issue."

Family Violence Court is heard every Wednesday at 2:30 in Courtroom J. The first graduation, in which three of the Family Violence Court participants will be recognized for successfully completing the program, will be held at 3:00 P.M. on Wednesday, May 20, 2009. Members of the public are always welcome to observe these proceedings.