

## MEDIA ADVISORY

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### GRADUATION CELEBRATES INDIVIDUAL ACHIEVEMENT AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

**WHAT:** The Fresno County drug court partners will hold a graduation ceremony to commend the participants who have completed or are scheduled to finish the two adult drug courts from November 2012 through December 2013. The graduation will celebrate the achievements of 141 graduates though only 35 will be able to take time from jobs or other commitments to participate. The event will also commemorate the 15<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the drug court program in Fresno County.

**WHEN:** 3 to 4 pm, October 25, 2013.

**WHERE:** Jury Assembly Room, **B.F. Sisk Courthouse**, 1130 O Street, Fresno.

**WHO:** Public defender Robert Delmare will be the master of ceremonies with probation officers from both drug courts presenting completion certificates to the graduates. The Honorable Gary Hoff, Presiding Judge of the Fresno Superior Court; the Honorable Debra Kazanjian who presides over both drug courts; and Tony Hoffman will speak.

Hoffman has himself struggled with addiction but turned his life around since release from prison in 2009. He recently retired as an elite professional BMX athlete who competed at the Olympic level for two years. He also is the founder and CEO of the Freewheel Project, a non-profit BMX racing organization devoted to educating youth on the importance of leading drug-free lives. Hoffman credits sobriety since May 2007 with his recent achievements. "Sobriety is the reason for all of my success today, without it I wouldn't have been in the right places to receive and take the opportunities that make me who I am now," he said.

**BACKGROUND:** A number of factors such as the participants' previous drug arrests and drug histories determine which of the two local drug courts they enter. Both courts link intensive substance abuse treatment, mental health therapy, and supportive services with regular drug testing, ongoing probation supervision, and strong judicial monitoring. National studies indicate that 70 percent of abusing/addicted offenders drop out of treatment prematurely unless they are regularly supervised and held accountable by a judge. In fact, drug courts are six times more likely to keep participants in treatment long enough for them to get better.

Both local programs take a minimum of 18 months to complete. To graduate, participants must maintain sobriety and progress through phases in which they achieve goals for education, housing, life-functioning skills, and employment to turn their lives around. Citing national data, Hoff noted that 75 percent of drug court graduates remain arrest-free at least two years after completing their programs realizing significant savings in arrest, prison, trial, and victimization costs for their communities. "In light of these positives outcomes for the participants, their families, and the community, we proudly celebrate that since its inception in 1998, more than 1500 persons have completed drug court in Fresno County," he said.

The drug court program is a cooperative partnership between the Fresno County Department of Behavioral Health – Substance Abuse Services, Fresno County District Attorney's Office, Fresno County Office of the Public Defender, Fresno County Probation Department, and the Fresno County Superior Court. Community organizations provide substance abuse treatment, mental health therapy, and supportive services.

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