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Case for drug court presented to Rotary Club

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SEGUIN — On a spectrum where drug and driving while intoxicated law violators will either rehabilitate themselves or go to prison, there is a large sampling in the middle that would benefit from participating in a drug court.

Guadalupe County Attorney Elizabeth Murray-Kolb made that case for a misdemeanor drug court in the county before the Seguin Noon Rotary on Tuesday at the coliseum.

“In America today, there are 30 million people who are drug and alcohol dependent, and 14 million people have been arrested for drug and alcohol offenses,” Kolb explained.

“Ninety percent of all child abuse and neglect cases are drug and alcohol related. What we’ve learned is that addiction is a brain disease. It’s chronic, lifelong and there is no cure, but treatment works,” she said.

And since there is a mandate for counties to institute drug courts when the population reaches 200,000, Guadalupe County is getting a head start.

Kolb cited the success for the past three years of a juvenile drug court, presided over by County-Court-At-Law Judge Linda Z. Jones, and said the intent was to create a misdemeanor drug court at no added cost to the county.

She said a drug court is a team approach involving a drug or alcohol offender’s family, prosecutors and defense attorneys, the presiding judge, probation officers and personnel who provide treatment.

A Drug Court Team began meeting in early April to hammer out a plan for organizing a drug court in the county.

Kolb said a drug court team would determine who the potential clients are through a screening process in the probation office.

“It is important to know where our clients are coming from so we can individualize their treatment. We will send a person to the probation department for testing. If they are high risk they go to jail. If they are low risk they don’t need what the drug court has to offer,” Kolb said.

The drug court program takes a non-adversarial approach, and the participants would have frequent monitoring through drug testing and court appearances. The idea is to have a defendant spend time before a drug court judge to get the idea of a judge as an authority

figure.

Kolb said that through a practice of cognitive behavior therapy, a participant in a drug court program could have a four-fold better chance of not returning to the regular court system.

“Drug and alcohol treatment and rehabilitation involves the entire family. It takes intervention, supervision, testing and status hearings before a judge,” Kolb said.

“We want them to achieve sobriety and basically their freedom,” she said.

“Drug and alcohol abuse is a blight on our families, our communities and our nation. We know from research that drug court works,” Kolb said.

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