

Stuart Graduates From Pathway to Recovery Program

By **Todd Marver**

Roy Stuart graduated from the Washington County Pathway to Recovery drug court program on Thursday, April 4. Stuart started drug court in October 2022.

Washington County Resident Circuit Judge Dan Emge said participants have to do a giving back project before they graduate drug court.

“The thought behind it is it’s a restorative justice themed project in which the participant gives back something to the community they took so much from during their use. Roy came up with the plan himself and his idea was to give back to assist the community to try to restore some of the things he took,” he said.

For his giving back project, Stuart chose to give back to the following three causes: church, Narcotics Anonymous and the Washington County Animal Shelter.

Stuart said he made a commitment to start going to church at Casey Avenue Baptist Church in Mt. Vernon, the same church that his mother attended and was a member of. He said when he was a kid, everyone was welcoming and always happy to see him.

“As I continued to attend, I noticed that I was getting more involved. The more involved I became, the more I learned. The more I learned, the more committed I became. Before I knew it, I had confessed all my sins and asked Jesus to come into my heart and that’s when things really started to move,” he said.

Stuart said to get knowledge and to be a positive reinforcement for the Narcotics Anonymous program, he began to attend, prep and chair the meetings at the UCC Church in Nashville.

“I also committed to share my strength, hope and wisdom at every meeting as well, listening to others as they share,” he said. “In addition, I took on the responsibility as the general service rep and treasurer for these meetings. I attend and give reports at Wesley United Methodist Church in

Mt. Vernon.”

Stuart said for the Washington County Animal Shelter, he committed to finding homes for two animals and also made personal donations and collected food from families, friends and the community.

“During this project, I found that the more I gave, the more I wanted to give. I found myself happy and committed. I found myself making healthy new relationships and connections with the community. I am grateful that I had an opportunity to be a part of this life changing project. I gave my time, commitment, heart and soul and funds. What I received far outweighs that. It has truly been my pleasure to be able to share a little bit of myself with our community,” he said.

Emge said drug court is pretty intense, participants have to do a lot and they go through a lot of counseling and have to do a lot of drug tests. He said they have to attend a fair amount of support group meetings to be successful.

“Roy has been doing this all for a year and a half. Roy has done an amazing job. Roy has been compliant for a very big part of drug court. There were several occasions in which Roy wasn’t compliant. Roy’s response to being non-compliant is what I’ll always remember,” he said.

Emge said if Stuart messed up, he was honest about it, accepted the consequences of his actions and moved on. He said that’s important not only in drug court to do that, but in life.

“Life doesn’t always go your way. How you respond to it not going your way says a lot. That makes the difference in some of you between being successful in life and some of you may not be successful. You’ve got a good outlook on things. Keep up your good work in recovery. Keep up with the support group meetings. They are so important to keep on the right track. We’re very proud of you and congratulations,” he said.

State’s Attorney Dan Janowski

said whenever public defender Dennis Hatch suggests, “What about drug court?”, oftentimes he thinks to himself that’s going to be quicker than trying to get the case resolved because he didn’t have a whole lot of faith.

“But you have proved me wrong. You’ve done very well. You’ve done a lot of work, but there’s still a lot of work to be done. I’m glad to see the progress here and I’m glad to be proven wrong in your case and I want to wish you all the best,” he said.

Hatch was a former prosecutor in Washington County. He was a former judge and then when he retired, Emge took over. After that, he became the public defender.

“I’ve been all over the place on all three sides. I’ve prosecuted people for using drugs. I’ve sentenced people for drug use and then I became their lawyer,” he said.

Hatch said back when they started this program, he was representing a lot of people who were using heroin and fentanyl.

“That was what was really going on when I became public defender. Everybody knows now the biggest use is meth. The problem with fentanyl and heroin is people were dying. As their lawyer I would sometimes, if they’re charged with it, try to get them out of jail because they don’t want to sit in jail,” he said.

Hatch said the way the drug court program started in conjunction with Emge is that he had gotten a young man out of jail and that next Friday morning he got a call that he had overdosed. He said the state’s attorney, judge and he said they have to do something different and the state has come in and recognized that.

“That’s why we have drug courts everywhere trying to give these people a chance to get away from that. There are very few people that die from meth overdoses. What happens is we lose family members and friends from being at home. They might have problems with work and



Washington County Resident Circuit Judge Dan Emge, left, presents the drug court completion certificate to Roy Stuart. Photo by Todd Marver

might have trouble with relationships. Because of that something has to be done differently,” he said.

Hatch picks out a song for all drug court graduates. For Stuart, he picked “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For” by Playing for Change.

“This song has got a little bit of a different beginning. It’s going to talk about people whose family members are gone. They’re missing. When you first see this video, you’re going to say, ‘Why’s he showing that?’ With the heroin and fentanyl and meth, you’ve lost a son or daughter. They might still be alive, but there’s issues because of that. They might have lost jobs. They might have lost relationships. It’s focused on people who might be missing overseas and other countries. But in reality it’s the same thing. You’ve lost somebody in your life and you’re always looking for them. You’re hoping that they come back,” he said.

Chris Mathis, Stuart’s counselor, said Stuart represents the very first person he has seen graduate that started out with him. He said the previous people he had were with another counselor prior, so for him this is a milestone.

“I have probably learned as much from Roy as he learned from me in the year and a half we’ve been together in counseling. He’s always had a good attitude. At least twice he was in disagreement with the program and a little disgruntled about something that was going on, but every single time, even during that time of being disgruntled, he has praised this program. At least 100 times he has said in my office that he is thankful to God for this program because it changed and saved his life,” he said.

Mathis said Stuart always had the best attitude towards drug court and he has had no chores in the year and a half that he has been dealing with Stuart. He said it hasn’t seemed like a job and he has enjoyed every encounter with Stuart.

“We’ve shot the breeze a lot in

the office and it has always been a pleasure. The counseling appointments reduce (over time). It starts out every week then it goes to maybe every two weeks and then near the end, it’s only once a month. There are times when I’ve had to ask Roy to please not stop by the office because I’ve got too much paperwork to do. He always wanted to stop by and check in with me. He wanted me to know he was doing well,” he said.

Mathis said he has standard questions he asks everybody that they get sick of hearing. He said the first two or three things he’ll ask them is if there has been any use and he wants them to look him in the eye and tell him if they’ve been using or not. He said then he’ll ask if there’s anything triggering them or if they have any cravings.

“Before I can even ask a question, Roy will come in and will say what his sober day is or the last time he used and no cravings or anything like that before I even have a pen in my hand where I can write down any answers. He’s always had the best attitude towards it. He’s always looked forward to what he needs to do,” he said.

Mathis said if somebody is going to be in recovery, there’s going to be a high degree of sacrifice that’s involved and it’s going to cost something either way. He said Stuart told him that when he came in for the assessment and he did it, he was done with the drug life and drinking.

“He said, ‘I’m committed to this.’ Roy has proven to me that he was dead serious about those words and he was willing to sacrifice anything that he had to do along the way. There have been a lot of participants in the program along the way that Roy has made a huge difference with. He has gone out of his way to help other people in the program along the way and made a huge difference. It has been a genuine pleasure and honor to be able to work with him,” he said.

Jessica Eldridge, chief manag-

ing officer of Washington County Probation, said one thing she will always appreciate about Stuart is his honesty. She said Stuart would always show up and be honest.

“For me, I get lied to every single day, so whenever someone is honest with me, I can work with you. It just makes our job so much easier. Another thing about Roy is his ability to self reflect. Even when he comes in and says, ‘Yeah I messed up but I’m still trying to figure things out and still trying to figure out recovery.’ A lot of people can learn from that because you are all still trying to figure it out. It doesn’t matter if it’s one year or five years down the road, you’re still going to be trying to figure things out and that’s OK. I’m proud of you and best of luck and keep coming back,” she said.

Heather Beninati, drug court officer, said she started in the position about a month after Stuart entered the program and they learned the program together.

“I’m proud of you coming in and we had a lot of conversations about what you were going to do in the program and how you were going to be. I’m glad you came in and were honest with me. There were times you fell, but you got right back up and got back on the horse. It was a pleasure to work with you. Back in 2018, I got a tattoo that says, ‘for every dark night, there’s a brighter day.’ I think that stands true here for drug court. You went through your dark day and I’m so proud of you for finding your brighter day,” she said.

Stuart said he couldn’t have done this without everyone who was present at his graduation.

“If any of you were taken out of the equation, I think the whole program would probably fail because it takes a lot of people, a lot of knowledge, a lot of training and a lot of hours. I’m grateful and thankful for that. I believe that I probably made some laugh and some cry,” he said.

Missouri Man Arrested on Armed Violence and Drug Charges

By **Todd Marver**

A Missouri man was arrested on armed violence and drug charges on Monday, April 8.

Dylon Jackson was charged with possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance (15-100 grams) and armed violence/Category I (Class X felony).

According to a press release from Nashville Police, around 7 p.m., NPД and Washington County Sheriff’s Office were informed of an incident regarding a domestic dispute where Jackson had reportedly made concerning threats. Initially, it was unknown if he was in Nashville or rural Nashville, WCSO jurisdiction.

Further information reportedly revealed that Jackson was at a residence in the 600 block of South Kaskaskia Street in Nashville. Jackson allegedly made comments about having a shootout with police if police were called to respond to him. NPД was reportedly also made aware that Jackson was armed with a handgun and hundreds of rounds of ammunition and also had access to other firearms. It was also reportedly discovered that Jackson did not have resi-

dency to the address he was at and was believed to be locked out of the house.

NPД and WCSO both had numerous officers respond to this incident. Officers staged in the area reportedly confirmed that Jackson was in the backyard of the house and the residents were not home. Officers then moved in and reportedly were able to swiftly take Jackson into custody before he could retrieve a weapon.

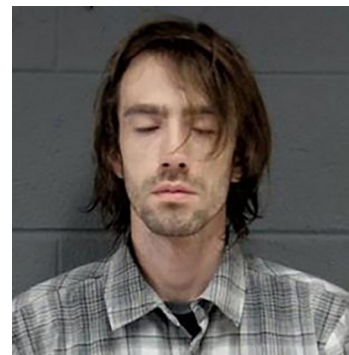
It was reportedly discovered that a witness observed Jackson toss an unknown item in a brush pile as police were approaching. This item was recovered and reportedly found to be a handgun with additional magazines of ammunition.

A search of Jackson’s property in the immediate area reportedly revealed a large quantity of narcotics, paraphernalia and a scale that indicated the intent to distribute. Jackson was placed under arrest and taken to the Washington County Jail. He is being held at the Washington County Jail.

In the residence, police also reportedly located additional narcotic-related contraband, a 9 millimeter rifle, an automatic

shotgun that was loaded with slugs and additional ammunition. Police were also reportedly made aware of concerning terroristic threats and comments that Jackson had been making, which were not specific and are still being looked into.

Nashville Police thanked the Washington County Sheriff’s Office for its assistance during the incident. NPД also thanked the Washington County Ambulance Service who had a crew stage in the area during this incident in case EMS was needed. There is an ongoing investigation. A petition to deny Jackson’s pretrial release has been filed. A detention hearing is set for April 11 at 10 a.m. in Washington County Court.



Dylon Jackson

Hutchings Found Not Guilty of Murder

By **Todd Marver**

A 21-year-old Pinckneyville man, Logan Hutchings was found not guilty on three counts of first degree murder in Perry County Court by Judge Gene Gross on Thursday, March 28.

In a statement, Matthew Benson, Hutchings’ defense attorney, said on Thursday, March 28 on the third day of the bench trial, the judge found that the state had not met their burden and Hutchings was acquitted of all charges he faced.

“This is a massive relief for Mr. Hutchings and his family. Logan maintained his innocence from the first time he came into my office. I’m glad we were able to assist him in obtaining the result he deserved,” he said.

Jennifer Mudge, prosecuting attorney from the Illinois State’s Attorneys Appellate Prosecutor’s office, said she was saddened and disappointed.

“I respected the court always, but in this case, I’m sad for the

baby that’s never going to get justice and I’m sad for his brother. I don’t know what his future holds, but it’s sad all around,” she said.

Mudge reported that in court, the judge said that they didn’t prove the case beyond a reasonable doubt.

“It’s a high burden. It’s not an impossible burden, but I respectfully disagree with that,” she said.

On April 4, 2023, the State’s Attorneys Appellate Prosecutor’s office charged Hutchings and his wife, Sophia Kelly, 21 of Pinckneyville with three counts each of first-degree murder. Both Hutchings and Kelly were taken into custody by ISP agents and transported to the Washington County Jail with a \$1 million bond, 10% to apply.

According to a press release from Illinois State Police, on June 12, 2022, ISP DCI was requested by the Illinois Department of Children and Family

Services (DCFS) and the Pinckneyville Police Department to investigate serious injuries sustained to a 3-month-old male infant. The infant had been admitted to a hospital in St. Louis, Missouri and was discovered to have a skull fracture, along with multiple rib fractures. Prior to the arrival at the hospital, the infant had been in the care of Hutchings and Kelly, the infant’s parents, in Pinckneyville. On June 14, 2022, the infant was pronounced deceased at the hospital as a result of these injuries.

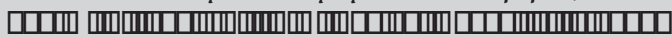
ISP DCI was assisted by DCFS, ISP Crime Scene Services, Pinckneyville Police Department, Washington County Sheriff’s Department and the Appellate Prosecutors Office during this investigation.

Kelly is set for a jury pre-trial on May 1 at 9 a.m. in Perry County Court.

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