



Farmington Daily Times

Man is 100th drug court graduate

By Debra Mayeux/The Daily Times

Nov 18, 2004, 01:28 am

AZTEC — Edward Gomez is clean.

The 35-year-old methamphetamine addict was the 100th person to successfully complete San Juan County Drug Court. He graduated Wednesday in District Judge John Dean's courtroom.

"I'm a lot better man than when I started," Gomez said with a big smile.

"I'm clean. I'm free. I'm healthy. I got my family back."

Gomez of Aztec started using meth after suffering a heart attack before his 32nd birthday. He slipped into depression and used drugs to try and find his way out. Instead methamphetamines took over his life.

"I had only used meth for eight months," he said. "It's harder to quit than anything."

It took Gomez two years and three months in Drug Court to find his way back to a life with a family, friendship and a job.

"Drug Court is not about doing without dope. It's learning to live responsibly," he said.

Gomez's best friend, Ron Williams, said he has noticed a change.

"He's more responsible. He's got a job, and he's not hocking his stuff anymore," Williams said.

Drug Court, which Gomez disliked in the beginning, was started in October 1997 in San Juan County. Since that time 352 people have participated, and more than 70 percent were meth users. There is a 13 percent recidivism rate.

The 100th graduate was a milestone for the state-funded Drug Court.

"This program works. There's definitely no doubt about that," Director Brad Ulrich said.

For many, like Gomez, it was easier to be in jail than to face the problems in his life. But Drug Court was there to pick him up when he made mistakes and encourage him to succeed.

"You give them a chance. If they mess up, they go to jail for awhile," Dean said. "Then, you give them another chance."

Gomez received a couple of chances and found the right path.

"There's only going to be the best for you," Ulrich said.

Friends, family and fellow users were there to offer words of encouragement, applause and to share cake and balloons.

"This is an opportunity we take to celebrate someone's accomplishments. ... We only celebrate today, and we don't worry about tomorrow," Judge Dean said.

Gomez said he will approach each day with a positive outlook and will use a 12-step program and support from friends and family to succeed.

"I wasn't arrested. I was rescued," Gomez said. **"It's all been worth it."**